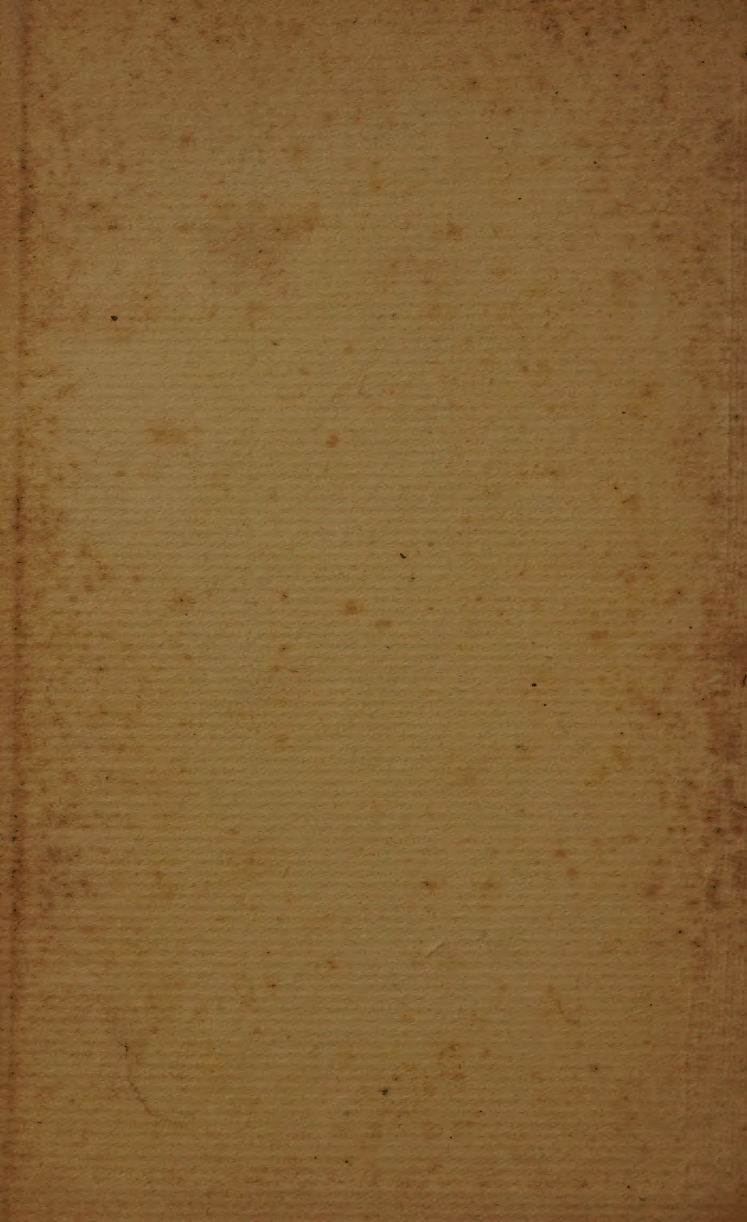


FAIRY TALES





Crofton Parish Church

Children's Service

1901 - 1902

Prize for Perfect Attendance

Awarded to

Jemima Smith

Ramsay Sibbald

HIDE AND SEEK;

OR,

THE MYSTERY OF MARY GRICE.

BY

WILKIE COLLINS.

Author of "The Woman in White," "Basil," etc.

A NEW EDITION.

RICHARD BUTTERWORTH & CO.,

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HIDE AND SEEK.

A CHILD'S SUNDAY.

At a quarter to one, on a wet Sunday afternoon, Samuel Snoxell, page to Mr. Zachary Thorpe, left the area gate with three umbrellas under his arm, to meet his master and mistress at the church door, on the conclusion of morning service. Snoxell had been specially directed by the housemaid to distribute his three umbrellas in the following manner: the new silk umbrella to Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe; the old silk umbrella to Mr. Goodworth, Mrs. Thorpe's father; and the heavy gingham to be kept by Snoxell himself, for the protection of "Master Zack," aged six, and the only child of Mr. Thorpe. Furnished with these instructions, the page set forth on his way.

The morning had been fine for November; but before mid-day the clouds had gathered, the rain had begun, and the inveterate fog of the season had closed dingily over the wet streets. The garden in the middle of Baregrove Square—with its close-cut turf, its vacant beds, its bran-new rustic seats, its withered young trees that had not yet grown as high as the railings around them—seemed to be rotting away in yellow mist and softly-steady rain, and was deserted even by the cats. All blinds were drawn down for the most part over all windows; what light came from the sky came like light seen through dusty glass; the grim brown hue of the brick houses looked more dirtily mournful than ever; the smoke from the chimney-pots was lost mysteriously in deepening superincumbent fog; the muddy gutters gurgled; the heavy rain-drops dripped into empty areas audibly. No object, great or small, no out-of-door

litter whatever appeared anywhere, to break the dismal uniformity of line and substance in the perspective of the square. No living being moved over the watery pavement, save the solitary Snoxell. He plodded on into a Crescent, and still the awful Sunday solitude spread grimly humid all around him. He next entered a street with some closed shops in it, and here, at last, consoling signs of human life attracted his attention. He now saw the crossing-sweeper of the district (off duty till church came out) smoking a pipe under the covered way that led to a mews. He detected, through half closed shutters, a chemist's apprentice yawning over a large book. He passed a navigator, an ostler, and two costermongers wandering backwards and forwards before a closed public-house door. He heard the heavy clop clop of thickly-booted feet behind him, and a stern voice growling, "Now then, be off, or you'll get locked up!"—and, looking round, saw an orange-girl, guilty of having obstructed an empty pavement by sitting on the curbstone, driven along by a policeman, who was followed admiringly by a ragged boy gnawing a piece of orange-peel. Having delayed a moment to watch this Sunday procession of three with melancholy curiosity, Snoxell was about to turn the corner of a street which led to the church, when shrill cries in a child's voice struck on his ear and stopped his progress.

The page stood still in astonishment for an instant, then pulled the new silk umbrella from under his arm, and turned the corner in a violent hurry. His suspicions had not deceived him. There was Mr. Thorpe walking sternly homeward through the rain, before church was over. He led by the hand "Master Zack," trotting along under protest, with his hat half off his head, hanging as far back from his father's side as he could, and howling at the utmost pitch of a powerful pair of lungs.

Mr. Thorpe stopped as he passed the page, and snatched the umbrella out of Snoxell's hand, with unaccustomed impetuosity; said sharply, "Go on to the church," and then resumed his road home, dragging his son faster than ever.

"Snoxy! Snoxy!" screamed Master Zack, turning round towards the page, so that he tripped himself up and fell against his father's legs at every third step; "I've been naughty at church!"

"Ah! you look like it," muttered Snoxell to himself, sarcastically. With that expression of opinion, the page approached the

church portico, and waited sulkily among his fellow servants and their umbrellas for the congregation to come out.

When Mr. Goodworth and Mrs. Thorpe left the church, the old gentleman seized eagerly on the despised gingham, because it was the largest he could get, and took his daughter home under it. Mrs. Thorpe was silent, and sighed dolefully once or twice, when her father's attention wandered from her to the people passing.

"You're fretting about Zack," said the old gentleman, looking at his daughter. Leave it to me. I'll beg him off this time."

"It's very disheartening to find him behaving so," said Mrs. Thorpe, "after the way we've brought him up, too!"

"Nonsense, my love! No, I don't mean that. But who can be surprised that a child of six should be tired of a sermon forty minutes long? I was tired of it myself, though I wasn't candid enough to show it as the boy did. There! we won't begin to argue; I'll beg Zack off this time."

Mr. Goodworth's announcement of his benevolent intentions seemed to have little effect on Mrs. Thorpe, but she said nothing on that subject, or any other, during the rest of the dreary walk, through rain, fog, and mud, to Baregrove Square.

Rooms have mysterious peculiarities of physiognomy as well as men. There are plenty of rooms, all of much the same size, all furnished in much the same manner, which, nevertheless, differ completely in expression (if such a term may be allowed) one from the other; reflecting the characters of their inhabitants by such fine varieties of effect in the furniture-features generally common to all, as are often, like the infinitesimal varieties of eyes, noses, and mouths, too intricately minute to be traceable. Now, the parlour of Mr. Thorpe's house was comfortably and sensibly furnished. It was of the average size. And yet it was an inveterately severe-looking room—a room that seemed as if it had never been convivial, never uproarious, never anything but sternly comfortable and serenely dull—a room which appeared to be as unconscious of acts of mercy, and over-affectionate forgiveness to offenders of any kind—juvenile or otherwise—as if it had been a cell in Newgate. Perhaps Mr. Goodworth felt thus affected by the parlour (especially in November weather) as soon as he entered it—for, although he had promised to beg Zack off, although Mr. Thorpe was sitting alone by the table and accessible to petitions, with a book in his hand, the

old gentleman hesitated uneasily, and suffered his daughter to speak first.

"Where is Zack?" asked Mrs. Thorpe, glancing nervously round her.

"He is locked up in my dressing-room," answered her husband, without taking his eyes off the book.

"In your dressing-room!" echoed Mrs. Thorpe, as startled and horrified as if she had received a blow; "in your dressing-room! Good Heavens! Zachary, how do you know the child hasn't got at your razors?"

"They are locked up," rejoined Mr. Thorpe, with mild reproof in his voice, and mournfullest self-possession in his manner. "I took care that he should get at nothing which could do him injury. He is locked up, and will remain locked up, because—"

"I say, Thorpe, won't you let him off this time?" interrupted Mr. Goodworth, boldly plunging, with his petition for mercy, into the conversation.

"If you had allowed me to proceed, sir," said Mr. Thorpe, who always called his father-in-law sir, "I should have remarked that, after having enlarged to my son (in terms I thought best fitted to his comprehension) on the disgrace to his parents and himself of his behaviour, I set him three verses to learn out of the 'Select Bible Texts for Children,' choosing the verses which seemed most likely to impress on him what his behaviour ought to be in church. He flatly refused to learn what I told him. It was impossible to allow my authority to be set at defiance by my own child (whose disobedient disposition has always, God knows, been a trouble and anxiety to me), so I locked him up, and locked up he will remain until he has obeyed. My dear," (turning to his wife and handing her a key), "I have no objection, if you wish, to your trying what you can do towards overcoming the obstinacy of this unhappy child."

Mr. Thorpe, when his wife closed the door, carefully looked down the open page for the place where he had left off—found it—referred a moment to the last lines of the preceding leaf—and then went on with his book, not taking the smallest notice of Mr. Goodworth.

"Thorpe!" cried the old gentleman, "you may say what you please, but your notion of bringing up Zack is wrong altogether."

With the calmest imaginable expression, Mr. Thorpe looked up from his book; and, carefully putting a paper-knife between the

leaves, placed it on the table. He then crossed one of his legs over the other, rested an elbow on each arm of his chair, and clasped his hands in front of him. On the wall opposite hung several lithographed portraits of distinguished preachers, in and out of the Establishment—mostly represented as sturdily-constructed men with bristly hair, fronting the spectator interrogatively, and holding thick books. Upon one of these portraits—the name of the original of which was stated at the foot of the print to be the Reverend Aaron Yollop—Mr. Thorpe now fixed his eyes, with a faint approach to a smile (he never was known to laugh), and with a look and manner which said plainly: "This old man is about to say something absurd; but he is my wife's father, it is my duty to bear with him, and, therefore, I am resigned."

"It's no use looking in that way, Thorpe," growled the old gentleman; "I'm not to be put down by looks at my time of life. I may have my own opinions, I suppose, like other people, and I don't see why I shouldn't express them when they relate to my daughter's boy. It's unreasonable of me, I dare say, but I think I ought to have a voice in Zack's bringing up."

Mr. Thorpe bowed respectfully—partly to Mr. Goodworth, partly to the Reverend Aaron Yollop. "I shall always be happy, sir, to listen to any expression of your opinion—"

"My opinion's this," burst out Mr. Goodworth. "You've no business to take Zack to church at all, till he's some years older. I don't deny that there may be a few children, here and there, at six years old, who are so patient and so precocious that they will sit quiet in the same place for two hours; making believe that they understand every word of the service, whether they do or not. I don't deny that there may be such children, though I never met with them, and should think them hypocrites if I did! But Zack isn't one; Zack's a genuine child (God bless him)! Zack—"

"Do I understand you, my dear sir," interposed Mr. Thorpe, sorrowfully sarcastic, "to be praising the conduct of my son in disturbing the congregation?"

"Nothing of the sort," retorted the old gentleman; "I'm not praising Zack's conduct, but I am blaming yours. You keep on cramming church down his throat, and he keeps on puking at it as if it was physic, because he can't know any better at his age. Is that the way to make him take kindly to religious

teaching? I know that he roared like a young Turk at the sermon. And what was the subject of the sermon? Justification by Faith. Do you mean to tell me that he, or any child at his time of life, could understand anything of such a subject; or get an atom of good out of it? I say again, it's no use taking him to church yet, and it's worse than no use, for you only associate his first ideas of religious instruction with everything in the way of restraint and punishment that can be irksome to him. There! that's my opinion, and I should like to hear what you've got to say against it?"

"Latitudinarianism," said Mr. Thorpe, speaking straight at the portrait of the Reverend Aaron Yollop.

"You can't fob me off with long words, which I don't understand, and don't believe you can find in Johnson's Dictionary," continued Mr. Goodworth, doggedly. "You would do better to take my advice, and let Zack go to church, for the present, at his mother's knees. Let his Morning Service be about ten minutes long; let your wife tell him, out of the New Testament, about Our Saviour's goodness and gentleness to little children; and let her teach him, from the Sermon on the Mount, to be loving and truthful, and forbearing and forgiving, for Our Saviour's sake. If such precepts are enforced—as they may be in one way or another—by examples drawn from his daily life; from people around him; from what he meets with and notices out-of-doors and in, he'll take kindly to his religious instruction. I've seen that in other children; I've seen it in my own children, who were all brought up so. Of course, you don't agree with me?"

"Rationalism," said Mr. Thorpe, still looking steadily at the portrait of the Reverend Aaron Yollop.

"Well, your objection's short this time, and that's a blessing!" said the old gentleman, irritably. "Rationalism—eh? I understand that ism, better than the other. It means that you think I'm wrong in only wanting to give religious instruction the same chance with Zack which you let all other kinds of instruction have—the chance of becoming useful by being first made attractive. You can't get him to learn to read by telling him it will improve his mind—but you can by getting him to look at a picture book. You can't get him to drink senna and salts by reasoning with him about its doing him good—but you can by promising him a lump of sugar. You admit this sort of

principle so far, because you're obliged; but the moment anybody wants (in a spirit of reverence and desire to do good) to extend it to higher things, you purse up your lips and talk about Rationalism—as if that was an answer! Well, well! it's no use talking, I wash my hands of the business. But now I am at it I'll just say this before I've done. Your way of punishing the boy for his behaviour in church is about as dangerous a one as could be devised. Why not give him a thrashing, if you must punish the miserable urchin? Why not stop his pudding? Here you are associating verses in the Bible, in his mind, with the idea of punishment. You may make him get his text by heart, but you'll make him learn, if you don't mind, to dislike the Bible as much as other boys dislike the birch!"

"Sir," cried Mr. Thorpe, turning round, and severely confronting Mr. Goodworth, "once for all, I must most respectfully insist on being spared open profanities in conversation, even from your lips. All my regard for you, as Mrs. Thorpe's father, shall not prevent me from recording my abhorrence of such infidelity as I believe to be involved in the words you have just spoken. My religious convictions recoil—"

"Stop, sir!" said Mr. Goodworth, sternly.

Mr. Thorpe obeyed. The old gentleman's manner was generally more remarkable for heartiness than dignity; but it altered completely while he now spoke. As he rose from his chair, there was something in his look it was not wise to disregard.

"Mr. Thorpe," he went on, very decidedly, "I refrain from telling you what my opinion is of the 'respect' and 'affection' which have allowed you to rebuke me in such terms. I merely desire to say that I shall never need a second reproof of the same kind; for I shall never again speak to you on the subject of my grandson's education. If you will now permit me, in my turn—not to rebuke—but to offer you advice, I would recommend you not to be too ready in future, lightly to accuse a man of infidelity, because his religious opinions differ on some subjects from yours. To infer a serious motive for your opponent's convictions, however wrong you may think them, can do you no harm; to infer a scoffing motive can do him no good. Let us never again revive a subject about which we disagree too widely to discuss it with advantage."

Mr. Goodworth did not forget the pledge that he had given to

Mr. Thorpe. From that time forth, he never, by word or deed, interfered again in his grandson's education.

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While she ascended the first flight of stairs, Mrs. Thorpe's ears informed her that her son was firing off one uninterrupted volley of kicks against the door of his place of confinement. As this was by no means unusual whenever the boy happened to be locked up for bad behaviour, she felt distressed, but not at all surprised, and went into the drawing-room, on her way upstairs, to deposit her Bible and Prayerbook on the little side table. Possibly, she was in too great a hurry; possibly, the household imp who rules the brittle destinies of domestic glass and china, had marked her as his destroying angel for that day. In placing the morocco case on the table, she knocked down and broke an ornament near it—a little ivory model of a church, enshrined in a glass case. Picking up the fragments, and mourning over the catastrophe, occupied some time, before she at last left the drawing-room, to proceed on her way to the upper regions.

As she laid her hand on the banisters, it struck her significantly, that the noises in the dressing-room above had ceased.

Her maternal imagination, uninfluenced by what Mr. Thorpe had said, conjured up an appalling vision of Zack before his father's looking-glass, with his chin lathered, and a bare razor at his naked throat. The child had a singular aptitude for amusing himself with adult occupations. Having once been taken into church by his nurse, to see a friend of hers married, Zack had, the next day, insisted on solemnizing the nuptial ceremony from recollection, before a bride and bridegroom of his own age, selected from playfellows in the garden of the square. Another time, when the gardener had incautiously left his lighted pipe on a bench while he went to gather a flower for one of the nurserymaids, whom he was accustomed to favour horticulturally in this way, Zack contrived to take three greedy whiffs of pigtail, was discovered reeling about like a little drunkard, and had to be smuggled home (deadly pale, and bathed in cold perspiration) to recover, out of his mother's sight, in the congenial gloom of the back kitchen. Although the infantine achievements here cited were unknown to Mrs. Thorpe, there were plenty more, like them, which she had discovered;

and the remembrance of which now hurried the poor lady up the second flight of stairs in a state of breathless agitation.

Zack, however, had not got at the razors, for they were locked up, as Mr. Thorpe had declared. But he had, nevertheless, discovered in the dressing-room a means of perpetrating mischief, which his father had never thought of providing against. Finding that kicking, screaming, stamping, and knocking down chairs, were powerless as methods of enforcing liberation, he suddenly suspended his proceeding, looked round the room, observed the cock which supplied his father's bath with water, and instantly resolved to flood the house. He had set the water going in the bath, had filled it to the brim, and was anxiously waiting, perched on a chair, to see it overflow, when his mother entered the room.

"Oh, you naughty child!" cried Mrs. Thorpe, horrified at what she beheld, but instantly stopping the threatened deluge from motives of precaution connected with the drawing-room ceiling. "Oh, Zack! what will you do next? What would your papa say if he heard of this? You wicked, wicked child, I'm ashamed to look at you!"

And, in truth, Zack offered at that moment a sufficiently disheartening spectacle for a mother's eyes to dwell on. There stood the imp, wriggling his shoulders in and out of his frock. His light hair was rumpled down over his forehead, his lips were swelled, his nose was red, and from his blue eyes Rebellion looked out frankly mischievous, amid a surrounding halo of dirt and tears, rubbed circular by his knuckles. After gazing on her son in despair for a minute or so, Mrs. Thorpe took the only course open to her—or, in other words, took the child off the chair.

"Have you learnt your lesson, you wicked boy?" she asked.

"No, I haven't," answered Zack, resolutely.

"Then come to the table with me; your papa's waiting to hear you. Come and learn your lesson directly," said Mrs. Thorpe, leading the way to the table.

"I won't!" rejoined Zack, emphasising the refusal by laying hold of the bath with both hands.

It was lucky for this rebel of six that he addressed his mother only. If his nurse had heard them, she would instantly have employed that old-established resource, familiarly known under the appellation of "a smack on the head"; if Mr. Thorpe had

heard them, the boy would have been torn away, bound to the back of a chair, and placed ignominiously with his chin against the table; if Mr. Goodworth had heard them, the probability is that he would have lost his temper, and soused his grandson in the bath. Not one of these ideas occurred to Mrs. Thorpe, who possessed no ideas. But she had substitutes infinitely more useful in the present emergency; she had instincts.

"Look at me, Zack," she said, returning to the bath, and sitting in the chair by its side; "I want to say something to you."

The boy obeyed. His mother opened her lips, stopped, said a few words, stopped again, hesitated, and then ended her sentence of admonition in the most ridiculous manner, by snatching at the nearest towel, and bearing Zack off to the wash-hand basin.

The fact was, that Mrs. Thorpe was secretly vain of her child. She had long since forced the strait-waistcoats of prudery and restraint over every other moral weakness but this—of all vanities most beautiful, of all human failings the most pure! She was proud of Zack! The dear, naughty, handsome, church-disturbing, door-kicking, house-flooding Zack! If he had been plain-featured she could have gone on more sternly, but to look coolly on his handsome face, made ugly by dirt, tears, and rumpled hair; to speak to him in that state, while soap, water, brush and towel were within reach, was more than the mother had self-denial to do! So, before it had well begun, the maternal lecture ended impotently in the wash-hand basin.

"I want you to learn your lesson, because you will please me by obeying papa. I have always been kind to you, now I want you to be kind to me."

For the first time, Zack hung his head, and seemed unprepared with an answer. Mrs. Thorpe knew what this symptom meant. "I think you are beginning to be sorry, and are going to be good," she said. "If you are you will give me a kiss." Zack hesitated, then suddenly reached up and gave his mother a hearty kiss on her chin. "And now you will learn your lesson?" continued Mrs. Thorpe. "I have always tried to make you happy, and I am sure you are ready to try and make me happy—are you not, Zack?"

"Yes," said Zack, manfully. His mother took him at once to the table, on which the "Select Bible Texts for Children"

lay open, and tried to lift him into a chair. "No!" said the boy, shaking his head, "I want to learn my lesson on your lap."

Zack, who was a quick boy when he chose to exert himself, got his lesson by heart in so short a time that his mother insisted on hearing him twice, before she could satisfy herself that he was perfect enough to appear in his father's presence. The second trial decided her doubts, and she took him in triumph downstairs.

Mr. Thorpe was reading, Mr. Goodworth was thinking, the rain was falling inveterately, the fog was thickening, and the austerity of the severe-looking parlour was hardening apace into its most adamant Sunday grimness, as Zack was brought to say his lesson. He got through it perfectly again, but his childish manner, during his third trial, altered from frankness to distrustfulness, and he looked oftener, while he said his task, at Mr. Goodworth than at his father. When the texts had been repeated, Mr. Thorpe just said to his wife, before resuming his book, "Tell the nurse, my dear, to get Zachary's dinner ready for him, though he doesn't deserve it for behaving so badly about learning his lesson."

"Please, grandpapa, may I look at the picture-book you brought for me last night?" said Zack, addressing Mr. Goodworth, and evidently feeling that he was entitled to reward now he had suffered punishment.

"Certainly not on a Sunday," interposed Mr. Thorpe, "your grandpapa's book is not a book for Sundays."

Mr. Goodworth seemed about to speak, but recollecting what he had said to Mr. Thorpe, contented himself with poking the fire. The book in question was a certain romance, entitled "Jack and the Beanstalk," adorned with illustrations in the freest style of water-colour art.

"If you want to look at picture books you know what books you may have to-day, and your mamma will get them for you when she comes in again," continued Mr. Thorpe.

The works now referred to were an old copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress," containing four small prints of the period of the last century, and a "Life of Moses." Zack knew well what books his father meant, and exhibited his appreciation of them by again beginning to wriggle his shoulders in and out of his frock. He had had more than enough already of the "Pilgrim's Progress" and the "Life of Moses."

Mr. Thorpe said no more, and returned to his reading. Mr. Goodworth yawned disconsolately, and looked, with a satirical expression, to see what his grandson would do. If the thought passing through the old gentleman's mind had been put into words, it would have been expressed in the following sentence: "You miserable boy! When I was your age, how I should have kicked at this!"

Zack was not long in finding a new resource. He spied Mr. Goodworth's cane in a corner; and, instantly getting astride of it, prepared to amuse himself with imaginary horse-exercise. He had just started at a gentle canter, when his father called out, "Zachary!" and brought the boy to a standstill.

"Put back the stick," said Mr. Thorpe; "you mustn't do that on Sunday. If you want to move about, walk up and down the room."

Zack paused, debating for an instant whether he should disobey or burst out crying.

"Put back the stick," repeated Mr. Thorpe.

Zack remembered the dressing-room and the "Select Bible Texts for Children," and wisely obeyed. He was by this time crushed into as rigid a state of Sunday discipline as his father could desire. After depositing the stick in the corner, he slowly walked up to Mr. Goodworth, with a comical expression of disgust in his chubby face, and laid down his head on his grandfather's knee.

"Never say die, Zack," said the old gentleman, taking the boy in his arms. "While nurse is getting your dinner, let's look out of window."

Mr. Thorpe raised his head disapprovingly from his book, but said nothing this time.

"Ah, rain! rain!" muttered Mr. Goodworth, staring out at the miserable prospect, while Zack amused himself by rubbing his nose backwards and forwards against a pane of glass. "Rain! rain! Nothing but rain and fog. Hold up, Zack! Ding-dong, ding-dong; there go the bells for afternoon church! I wonder whether it will be fine to-morrow? Think of the pudding, my boy!" whispered the old gentleman, with a benevolent remembrance of the consolation which that thought had often afforded to him when a child.

"Yes," said Zack, acknowledging the pudding suggestion, but declining to profit by it. "And, please, when I've had my dinner, will somebody put me to bed?"

"Put you to bed!" exclaimed Mr. Goodworth. "Why, bless the boy, what's come to him? He used to be wanting to stop up."

"I want to go to bed, and get to to-morrow, and have my picture-book," was the weary and whimpering answer.

"I'll be hanged if I don't want to go to bed too!" soliloquised the old gentleman, "and get to to-morrow, and have my 'Times' at breakfast. I'm as bad as Zack, every bit!"

"Grandpapa," continued the child, more wearily than before, "I want to whisper something in your ear."

Mr. Goodworth bent down. Zack looked cunningly towards his father, then, putting his mouth close to his grandfather's ear, communicated the conclusion at which he had arrived, after the events of the day:—

"I say, grandpapa, I hate Sunday!"

BOOK I.

THE HIDING.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD, AND A STRANGE CHARACTER.

At the period when the episode related occurred in the life of Mr. Zachary Thorpe the younger, Bargrove Square was the furthest square from the city, and the nearest to the country, of any then existing in the north-western suburb of London. But by the time fourteen years more had elapsed, Baregrove Square had lost its distinctive character; other squares had filched from it those remnants of healthy rustic flavour, from which its good name had been derived; other crescents, rows, and villa-residences had forced themselves between the old suburb and the country, and had suspended for ever the once neighbourly relations between Baregrove Square and the pleasant fields.

The new neighbourhood offered house-accommodation---accepted at the higher prices as yet only to a small extent---to three sub-divisions of the great middle class. Rents and premises were adapted, in a steeply descending scale, to the means of the middle classes with large incomes, of the middle classes with moderate incomes, and of the middle classes with small incomes. The abodes for the large incomes were called "mansions," and were fortified strongly against the rest of the suburb by being all built in one wide row, shut in at either end by ornamental gates, and called a "park." The unspeakable desolation of aspect common to the whole suburb, was in a high state of perfection in this part. Irreverent street noises fainted away on the threshold of the ornamental gates, at the sight of the hermit lodge-keeper. The cry of the costermonger and the screech of the vagabond London boy were banished. Even the tradesman's time-honoured business noises at customers'

doors, seemed as if they ought to have been relinquished here. The frantic falsetto of the milkman, the crash of the furious butcher's cart over the never-to-be pulverised stones of the new road through the "park," sounded profanely to the passing stranger, in the spick-and-span stillness of this Paradise of the large incomes.

The small incomes had the worst end of the locality entirely to themselves, and absorbed all the noises and nuisances, just as the large incomes absorbed all the tranquillities and luxuries. Each house in this poor man's purgatory was in awful literalness, a brick box with a slate top. Every hole drilled in these boxes, whether door-hole or window-hole, was always overflowing with children. They often mustered by fifties in one street, and were the pervading feature of the quarter. In the world of the large incomes, young life sprang up like a garden fountain, artificially playing only at stated periods in the sunshine. In the world of the small incomes, young life flowed out turbulently into the street in all weathers. Next to the children of the inhabitants, in visible numerical importance, came the shirts and petticoats, and miscellaneous linen of the inhabitants; fluttering out to dry publicly, and enlivening the treeless gardens where they hung, with lightsome avenues of pinafores, and solemn-spreading foliage of stout Welsh flannel. Here that passion for oranges, which distinguishes the city English girl of the lower orders, flourished in its finest development; and here, also, the poisonous fumes of the holiday shop-boy's bad cigar told resident nostrils when it was Sunday, as plainly as the church bells could tell it to resident ears.

As for the central portion of the suburb—the locality of the moderate incomes—it reflected exactly the lives of those who inhabited it, by presenting no distinctive character of its own.

In one part, the better order of houses imitated as pompously as they could, the grandeur of the mansions owned by the large incomes; in another, the worst order of houses narrowly escaped a general resemblance to the brick boxes of the small incomes. In some places, the "park" influences vindicated their existence superbly in the persons of isolated ladies who, not having a carriage to go out in, exhibited the next best thing, a footman to walk behind them; and so got a pedestrian airing genteelly in that way. In other places, the obtrusive spirit of the brick boxes rode about, thinly disguised, in children's car-

riages, drawn by nursery-maids; or fluttered aloft in the shape of a lace pocket-handkerchief, or a fine-worked chemisette, drying modestly at home in retired corners of back gardens. Generally, however, the hostile influences of the large incomes and the small mingled together on the neutral ground of the moderate incomes, turning it into the dullest, the dreariest division of the whole suburb.

On the outskirts of that part of the new suburb appropriated to the middle classes with moderate incomes, there lived a gentleman—Mr. Valentine Blyth.

He was by profession an artist—an artist in spite of circumstances. Neither his father, nor his mother, nor any relation, had ever practised the Art of Painting, or derived pleasure from the contemplation of pictures. They were all respectable commercial people of the old school, who lived exclusively within their own circle; and had never spoken to a live artist or author in their lives. The City-world in which Valentine's boyhood was passed, was as destitute of art influences as if situated on the coast of Greenland; and yet, to the astonishment of everybody, he was always drawing and painting, in his rude way, at every leisure hour. His father was seriously disappointed at the direction taken by the boy's inclinations. No one could trace them back to any recognisable source; but everyone could observe plainly that there was no hope of successfully opposing them. Seeing this, old Mr. Blyth made a virtue of necessity, and, giving way to his son, entered him as a student in the schools of the Royal Academy.

Here Valentine remained, working industriously, until his twenty-first birthday. On that occasion, Mr. Blyth had a serious talk with him about his prospects. The young man was informed that a merchant-uncle was ready to take him into partnership; and that his father was equally ready to start him in business with his share, as one of three children, in the inheritance acquired for the family by the well-known City house of Blyth and Company. If Valentine consented his fortune was secured. If, on the other hand, he chose to fling away a fortune, he should not be pinched for means to carry on his studies as a painter. The interest of his inheritance on his father's death should be paid quarterly during his father's lifetime; the annual independence thus secured to the young artist being calculated as amounting to a little over four hundred a year.

Valentine was not deficient in gratitude. He took a day to consider what he should do, though his mind was made up beforehand; and then persisted in his first determination, throwing away the certainty of becoming a wealthy man for the sake of the future chance of turning out a great painter.

If he had possessed genius, there would have been nothing remarkable in this; but, holding not the smallest spark of the great creative fire in his composition, there was something discouraging to contemplate, in the spectacle of a man determining to abandon all those paths in life, along which he might have walked abreast with his fellows, for the one path in which he was predestinated to be always left behind. Do the announcing angels, whose mission it is to whisper of greatness to great spirits, ever catch the infection of fallibility from their intercourse with mortals? Do the voices which said to Shakespeare, to Raphael, and to Mozart, in their youth: You are chosen to be gods in this world—ever speak wrongly to souls which they are not ordained to approach? It may be so. There are men enough in all countries whose lives would seem to prove it.

Thus it was with Valentine. He had sacrificed a fortune to his Art and his Art—in the world's eye—had given him nothing in return. Friends and relatives who had not scrupled, on being acquainted with his choice of a vocation, to call it in question, friends and relatives who upbraided Valentine for his refusal to accept the partnership in his uncle's house, affected, on discovering that he made no public progress in Art, to believe that he was simply idle. To a man who laboured like poor Blyth, with the steadiest industry and the highest aspirations, such whispered calumnies were mortifications most cruel.

Still he worked on patiently, never losing hope, because he never lost the love of his Art, or the enjoyment of pursuing it, irrespective of results. Like most other men of slight intellectual calibre, the works he produced were various. He was by turns devotional, allegorical, historical, sentimental, humorous. At one time he abandoned figure-painting, and took to landscape; now producing conventional studies from Nature—and now, again, revelling in poetical compositions, which might have hung undetected as doubtful specimens of Berghem or Claude.

But whatever department Valentine tried to excel in, the same destiny seemed always in reserve for each effort. For

years his pictures pleaded for admission at the Academy doors, and were invariably (and not unfairly) refused even the worst places on the walls. Season after season he bravely struggled on, never depressed, never hopeless while he was before his easel, until at last the day of reward—long and painfully wrought for—arrived. A small picture of a very insignificant subject—being only a kitchen “interior,” with a sleek cat on a dresser, stealing milk from the tea-tray—was benevolently marked “doubtful” by the Hanging Committee; was thereupon kept in reserve, in case it might fit any forgotten place near the floor—did fit such a place—and was really hung, as Mr. Blyth’s contribution to the one thousand and odd works exhibited that year, by the Royal Academy.

But Valentine’s triumph did not end here. His picture of the cat stealing the household milk—entitled, by way of appealing jocosely to the strong Protestant interest, “The Jesuit in the Family,”—was really sold to an Art-Union prize-holder for ten pounds. Once furnished with a bank note won by his own brush, Valentine indulged in most extravagant anticipations of future celebrity; and proved, recklessly enough, that he believed as firmly as any visionary in the wildest dreams of his imagination, by marrying, and setting up an establishment, on the strength of the success achieved by “The Jesuit in the Family.”

He had been for some time engaged to the lady who had now become Mrs. Valentine Blyth. She was the youngest of eight sisters, who formed part of the family of a poor engraver, and who, in the absence of mere money qualifications, were all rich in the ownership of most magnificent Christian names. Mrs. Blyth was called Lavinia-Ada; and hers was by far the humblest name among the sisterhood. Valentine’s relations objected to this match, not only on account of the bride’s property, but for another and serious reason, which events proved to be well founded.

Lavinia had suffered severely, as a child, from a spinal malady. Such medical attendance as her father could afford had, it was said, successfully combated the disorder, and the girl grew up prettier than her sisters, and apparently strong. Old Mr. Blyth, however, hearing that his son was now as determined to become a married man as he had formerly been to become a painter, thought it advisable to make inquiries about the young lady’s

constitution; and addressed them, with characteristic caution, to the family doctor.

The result of this conference was far from satisfactory. The doctor was careful not to commit himself: he said he hoped the spine was no longer in danger; but that he could not conscientiously express himself as sure about it. Having repeated these discouraging words to his son, old Mr. Blyth delicately, but plainly, asked Valentine whether, after what he had heard, he still thought he would be consulting his own happiness, or the lady's happiness either, by marrying her? or, at least, by marrying her at a time when the doctor could not say that the poor girl might not be even yet in danger of becoming an invalid for life?

Valentine, as usual, persisted in looking exclusively at the bright side, and made light of the doctor's authority.

"Lavvie and I love each other," he said, with a trembling in his voice, but with firmness of manner. "I hope that what you fear will never happen; but if it should, I shall never repent having married her, for I am as ready to be her nurse as to be her husband. In my home she would have such constant attention paid to her as she could not have at her father's! And this is reason enough, I think, for my marrying her, even if the worst should take place. But I always have hoped for the best; and I mean to go on hoping for Lavvie, the same as ever!"

What could old Mr. Blyth, what could any man of heart, oppose to such an answer? Nothing. The marriage took place; and Valentine's father tried hard to feel as sanguine about future results as Valentine himself.

For several months the happiness of the painter and his wife more than fulfilled the brightest hopes they had formed as lovers. As for the doctor's words, they were hardly remembered, or were recalled only to be laughed over. But the time of bitter grief came inexorably, even while they were still jesting at all medical authority. Lavinia caught a cold. The cold turned to rheumatism, to fever, then to general debility, then to nervous attacks—each of these disorders, being but so many false appearances, under which the spinal malady was treacherously advancing in disguise.

When the first positive symptoms appeared, old Mr. Blyth acted with his accustomed generosity. "My purse is yours,

Valentine," said he; "let Lavinia have the same advice and the same remedies as if she was the greatest duchess in the land." The most renowned doctors prescribed for Lavinia; everything that science could do, was done; but the disease still baffled remedy after remedy, until at last the doctors lost hope.. So far as human science could foretell, Mrs. Blyth was doomed never to rise again from the bed on which she lay; except, perhaps, to be sometimes moved to the sofa, or, in the event of favourable reaction, to be wheeled about occasionally in an invalid chair.

What the shock of this intelligence was, to husband and wife, no one ever knew; they kept it a secret even from each other. Mrs. Blyth was the first to recover calmness. She begged that Valentine would seek consolation, where she knew he must find it, by going back to his studio, and resuming his familiar labours, which had been suspended from the time her illness had originally declared itself.

On the first day, when he sat before his picture again—the half-finished picture from which he had been separated for many months—on that first day, when the occupation of his life seemed suddenly to have grown strange; when his brush wandered idly among the colours, when his tears dropped fast on the palette; when he tried hard to work as usual, though only for half an hour, only on simple background places in the composition; and still the brush made false touches, and still the tints would not mingle, and still the same words, repeated over and over again, would burst from his lips: "Oh, poor Lavvie! oh, poor, dear Lavvie!"—even then, the spirit of that beloved art, which he had always followed so humbly, was true to its divine mission, and comforted and upheld him at the last bitterest moment when he laid down his palette in despair.

While he was still hiding his face before the very picture which he and his wife had once innocently and secretly glorified together, in those happy days of its beginning that were never to come again, the thought of consolation shone out on his heart, and showed him how he might adorn his after-life with the deathless beauty of a noble purpose. Thenceforth, his vague dreams of fame, and of rich men wrangling for the possession of his pictures, took the second place in his mind; and, in their stead, sprang up the new resolution that he would win independently, with his brush, no matter at what sacrifice of pride, the

means of surrounding his sick wife with those luxuries and refinements which his own little income did not enable him to obtain, and which he shrank from accepting as presents bestowed by his father's generosity. Here was the consoling purpose which robbed affliction of half its bitterness, and bound him and his art together by a bond more sacred than any that united them before. In the very hour when this thought came to him, he rose without a pang to turn the great historical composition, from which he had hoped so much, to the wall, and set himself to finish an unpretending little "Study" of a cottage, which he was certain of selling. The first approach to happiness which he had known for long, was on the evening of that day, when he went upstairs to sit with Lavinia; and, keeping secret his purpose of the morning, made the sick woman smile in spite of her sufferings, by asking her how she should like to have her room furnished, if she were the lady of a great lord, instead of being the wife of Valentine Blyth.

Then came the day when the secret was revealed, and afterwards the pleasant years when poor Mrs. Blyth's most splendid visions of luxury were realised through her husband's exertions in his profession. But for his wife's influence, Valentine would have been in danger of abandoning High Art and Classical Landscape altogether, for cheap portrait-painting, and cheap studies of Still Life. But Mrs. Blyth, bedridden as she was, contrived to preserve her old influence over the labours of the Studio, and would receive nothing new in her room, except on condition that her husband was to paint at least one picture of High Art every year, for the sake (as she said) of "asserting his intellect and his reputation in the eyes of the public." Accordingly Mr. Blyth's time was equally divided between the production of great unsaleable "compositions," which were always hung near the ceiling in the Exhibition, and of small marketable commodities, which were as invariably hung near the floor.

Valentine's earnings from his art, though humble, sufficed to fulfil the affectionate purpose for which, to the last farthing, they were set aside. "Lavvie's Drawing-Room" (this was Mr. Blyth's name for his wife's bedroom) looked as bright and beautiful as any royal chamber. No one but himself ever knew what he had sacrificed in labouring to gain these things. The heartless people whose portraits he had painted, and whose

impertinences he had patiently submitted to; the mean bargainers who had treated him like a tradesman; the dastardly men of business who had disgraced their order by taking advantage of his simplicity—how hardly and cruelly such insect natures of this world had often dealt with that noble heart! how despicably they had planted their gadfly stings in the high soul which it was never permitted to them to subdue!

No! not once to subdue, not once to tarnish! All petty humiliations were forgotten in on elook at "Lavvie's Drawing-Room"; all stain of insolent words vanished from Valentine's memory in the atmosphere of the Studio. Never was a more superficial judgment pronounced than when his friends said that he had thrown away his life, because he had chosen a vocation in which he could win no public success. The lad's earliest instincts had led him truly, after all. The art to which he had devoted himself was the only earthly pursuit that could harmonise as perfectly with all the eccentricities as with all the graces of his character, that could mingle happily with every joy, tenderly with every grief, belonging to the simple, and innocent life, which, employ him anyhow, it was in his original nature to lead. But for this protecting art, under what prim disguises, amid what foggy social climates of class conventionality, would the worlds clerical, legal, mercantile, military, naval or dandy, have extinguished this man, if any one of them had caught him in its snares! Where would have been his frolicsome enthusiasm that nothing could dispirit; his oddities of thought, speech, and action, which made friends laugh at him and bless him in the same breath; his affections, so manly in their firmness, so womanly in their tenderness, so childlike in their frank, fearless confidence that dreaded neither ridicule nor deception? Where, and how, would all these characteristics have vanished, but for his art—but for the abiding spirit, ever present to preserve their vital warmth against the outer and earthly cold? The wisest of Valentine's friends, who shook their heads disparagingly whenever his name was mentioned, were at least wise enough in their generation never to ask themselves such embarrassing questions as these.

CHAPTER II.

MR. BLYTH IN HIS STUDIO.

It was wintry weather, a brisk frosty morning in January. The country view visible from the back windows of Mr. Blyth's house, which stood on the extreme limit of the new suburb, was brightly dressed out for the sun's morning levée, in its raiment of snow. The sky was cloudless; every sound out of doors fell on the ear with a hearty and jocund ring; all fires burnt brightly; and the red-breasts hopped about expectantly on balconies and window-sills, as if they only waited for an invitation to walk in and warm themselves.

The Studio was large and lofty. Its walls were covered with plain brown paper, its floor only carpeted in the middle. The most prominent pieces of furniture were two easels at either extremity of the room; each supporting a picture of considerable size, covered over with a pair of sheets which looked in want of washing. There was a painting-stand with shallow little drawers, some too full to open, others too full to shut; there was a movable platform to put sitters on, covered with red cloth disguised in dust; there was a small square table of new deal, and a large table of dilapidated rosewood, laden with sketch-books, portfolios, tin pots, scattered brushes, palette-knives, rags defiled by paint and oil, pencils, chalks—the whole smelling powerfully of turpentine.

There were chairs in plenty, no one of which, however, resembled the other. In one corner stood a mouldy antique chair with a high back, and a basin of dirty water on the seat. By the fireplace a straw chair was tilted over against a dining-room chair. Before the largest of the two pictures, and hard by a portable flight of steps, stood a rickety office-stool. On the platform for sitters a modern easy chair, invited models to picturesque repose. Close to the rosewood table was a rocking chair, and between the legs of the deal table were huddled a camp-stool and a hassock. In short, every remarkable variety of seat was represented in Mr. Blyth's painting-room.

All surplus small articles which shelves, tables, and chairs were unable to accommodate, reposed in confusion on the floor. Half of a pack of cards seemed scattered in this way. A shirt-collar, three gloves, a boot, a shoe, and half a slipper; a silk stocking, a pair of worsted muffetees; three old play-bills rolled

into a ball; a pencil-case, a paper-knife, a tooth-powder-box without a lid, and a superannuated black-beetle trap turned bottom upwards, assisted in forming part of the heterogeneous collection strewn about the floor. And worse than all—as tending to show that the painter absolutely enjoyed his disorderly habits—Mr. Blyth had jocosely desecrated his art, by making it imitate litter where, in all conscience, there was litter enough already. Just in the way of anybody entering he had painted, on the floor, representations of a quill pen and a very expensive-looking sable brush, lying all ready to be trodden upon. Fresh visitors constantly attested the skilfulness of these imitations by stooping to pick up the illusive pen and brush; Mr. Blyth always enjoying the discomfiture of every new victim, as thoroughly as if the practical joke had been perfectly new on each successive occasion.

The clock had just struck ten, when light steps approach the studio door. A gentleman enters—trips gaily over the imitative pen and brush—and, walking up to the fire, begins to warm his back. This is Mr. Valentine Blyth.

He looks under forty, but is really a little over fifty. His face is round and rosy, and not marked by a single wrinkle. He has large, sparkling black eyes; keeps his thick curly black hair rather closely cut, and has a comical kindness of expression in his face, which it is not easy to contemplate for the first time without smiling. He is tall and stout, wears tight trousers, and keeps his wristbands turned up over the cuffs of his coat. His movements are quick and fidgety. He appears to walk principally on his toes, and seems always on the point of beginning to dance, or jump, or run whenever he moves. When he speaks he has an odd habit of ducking his head, and looking at the person whom he addresses over his shoulder. These, and other little peculiarities of the same nature, all contribute to make him that sort of person whom everybody shakes hands with, and nobody bows to, on a first introduction.

Mr. Blyth walks towards an earthen pipkin in one corner of the studio, and takes from it a little china palette which he has neglected to clean since he last used it. Looking round the room for some paper, on which he can deposit the old paint that has been scraped off with the palette knife, Mr. Blyth's eyes light first on the deal table, and on four or five notes scattered over it.

These he thinks will suit his purpose, so he takes up the notes, but before making use of them reads their contents for the second time—partly by way of caution, partly through a dawdling habit, which men of his absent disposition are always ready to contract. Three of these letters happen to be in the same scrambling, blotted handwriting. They are none long, and are the production of a former acquaintance of the reader's, who has somewhat altered in personal appearance during the last fourteen years. Here is the first note which Valentine is now reading:—

“Dear Blyth,—My father says Theatres are the Devil's Houses, and I must be home by eleven. I'm sure I never did anything wrong at a Theatre, which I might not have done the same anywhere else; unless laughing over a good play is one of the national sins he's always talking about. I can't stand it much longer, even for my mother's sake! You are my only friend. I shall come and see you to-morrow, so be at home. How I wish I was an artist! Yours ever, Z. THORPE, JUN.”

Shaking his head and smiling at the same time, Mr. Blyth finishes this letter—drops a puddle of dirty paint and turpentine in the middle, over the words “national sins,” throws the paper into the fire—and goes on to note number two:—

“Dear Blyth,—I couldn't come yesterday, because of another quarrel at home, and my mother crying about it. My father smelt tobacco smoke at morning prayers. It was my coat, which I forgot to air the night before; and he found it out, and said he wouldn't have me smoke, because it led to dissipation—but I told him that lots of parsons smoked. I wish you visited at our house, and could say a word on my side. I am perfectly wretched; for I have had all my cigars taken from me, and I am, yours truly, Z. THORPE, JUN.”

A third note is required before the palette can be scraped clean. Mr. Blyth reads the contents gravely on this occasion; rapidly plastering his waste paint upon the paper as he goes on, until at length it looks as if it had been peppered with all the colours of the rainbow.

Zack's third letter promised serious domestic tribulation for the ruling power at Baregrove Square:—

“Dear Blyth,—I have given in—at least for the present.. I told my father about my wanting to be an artist, and your saying that I had a good notion of drawing; but I might as well have talked to one of your easels. He means to make a man

of business of me. And here I have been, for the last three weeks, at a Tea Broker's office in the city. They all say it's a good opening, and talk about the respectability of commercial pursuits. I don't want to be respectable, and I hate commercial pursuits. What is the good of forcing me into a merchant's office, when I can't say my Multiplication table? Only fancy me going round tea warehouses in filthy Jewish places like St. Mary-Axe, to take samples, with a blue bag to carry them in; and a dirty junior clerk, who cleans his pen in his hair, to teach me how to fold up parcels! Isn't it enough to make my blood boil? I won't go on in this way! Mind you're at home to-morrow; I'm coming to speak to you about how I'm to begin learning to be an artist. The junior clerk is going to do my sampling work for me in the morning; and we are to meet in the afternoon, after I have come away from you, at a chop-house, and then go back to the office as if we had been together all day. Ever yours, Z. THORPE, JUN.'—P.S. My mind's made up; if the worst comes to the worst, I shall leave home."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" says Valentine, rubbing his palette clean with a piece of rag. "What will it all end in? Old Thorpe's going the way, with his obstinate severity, to drive Zack to something desperate. Coming here to-morrow, he says?" continues Mr. Blyth, approaching the smallest of the two pictures. "Coming to-morrow! He never dates his notes; but I suppose, as this one came last night, to-morrow means to-day."

Saying these words with eyes absently fixed on his picture, Valentine withdraws the sheet stretched over the canvas, and discloses a Classical Landscape of his own composition.

After standing before his picture in affectionate contemplation of its beauties, Valentine resumes the business of preparing his palette.

As the bee comes and goes irregularly from flower to flower; as the butterfly flutters from one sunny place on the garden wall to another—or, as an old woman runs from wrong omnibus to wrong omnibus, before she can discover the right one—so does Mr. Blyth now run, and blunder in a mighty hurry about his studio, in search of missing colours which ought to be in his painting-box, but which are not to be found. While he is still hunting through the room, his legs come into collision with a large drawing-board on which there is a blank sheet of paper

stretched. This board seems to remind Mr. Blyth of some duty. He places it against two chairs, in a good light; then approaching a shelf on which plaster-casts are arranged, takes from it a bust, which bust he places on his old office stool, opposite to the two chairs and the drawing-board. Just as these preparations are completed the door opens, and a very important member of the painter's household—in no way related either to Valentine or his wife—enters.

She is dressed in pretty, simple, Quaker-like attire. Her gown is of a light grey, covered by a little black apron, and fastened round the throat over a frill collar. The sleeves are tight to the arm, and terminate by quaint-looking cuffs of antique lace, the only ornamental morsels of costume which she has on. It is impossible to describe how deliciously soft, bright, pure, and delicate this young lady is, merely as an object to look at, contrasted with the dingy disorder of the studio. The keenest observer would detect nothing in her face or figure, her manner or costume, in the slightest degree suggestive of mystery, or misfortune. And yet, she happens to be the only person in Mr. Blyth's household at whom prying glances are directed, whenever she walks out; whose existence is referred to by the painter's neighbours with an accompaniment of shrugs, sighs, and lamenting looks; and whose "case" is always compassionately designated as "sad," whenever it is brought forward, in the course of conversation, at dinner-tables and tea-tables in the new suburb.

She seemed fated to be used as a subject of conversation by her fellow-creatures. Even her face alone—simply as a face—could not escape discussion; and that, too, among Valentine's friends, who knew her well, and loved her. It was the oddest thing in the world, but no one could ever agree with another (except on a certain point), as to which of her attractions ought to be first selected for approval, or quoted as particularly asserting her claims to admiration.

There was Mr. Gimble, the little picture-dealer, and a good friend in every way to Valentine; there was Mr. Gimble, who declared that her principal charm was in her complexion—her clear, wonderful complexion—which he would defy any artist to paint. Then came the Dowager Countess of Brambledown, the frolicsome old aristocrat, generally believed to be "cracked"; who haunted Mr. Blyth's studio, after having once given him an

order to paint her rare China tea-service, and her favourite muff, in one group; and who differed entirely from the picture-dealer. "Fiddle-de-dee!" cried her ladyship, on hearing Mr. Gimble's opinion. "The man may know something about pictures, but he is an idiot about women. Complexion, indeed! I could make as good a complexion myself (we women are painters too, Blyth). Don't tell me about her complexion—it's her eyes! her incomparable eyes, which would have driven the young men of my time mad! Not a gentleman, sir—and they were gentlemen then—but would have been happy to run away with her for her eyes alone; and what's more, to have shot any man who said 'Stop!' Complexion, indeed, Mr. Gimble! I'll complexion you, next time I find my way into your gallery! Take a pinch of snuff, Blyth, and never repeat nonsense in my hearing."

There was Bullivant, the enthusiastic young sculptor with the mangy flaxen hair, and the plump, waxy face; who wrote poetry, and showed, by various sonnets, that he differed completely about the young lady from the Dowager Countess of Bramble-down and Mr. Gimble. This gentleman sang fluently, on paper—using, by the way, a professional epithet—about her "chiselled mouth,"

"Which breathed of rapture and the balmy South."

He expiated on

"Her sweet lips smiling at her dimpled chin,

Whose wealth of kisses gods might long to win—"
and more to the same maudlin effect. Bullivant was all for the lower part of the young lady's face, and worried her, and Mr. Blyth, until he got leave to take a cast of it.

Lastly, there was Mrs. Blyth's father; a meek old gentleman, with a continual cold; who lived on to the utmost verge of human existence—as poor men, with very large families, who would be much better out of this world than in it, often do. There was this low-speaking, mildly-infirm, and perpetually-snuffling engraver, who, being asked to mention what he most admired in her, answered that he thought it was her hair, "which was of such a nice light brown colour; or, perhaps, it might be the pleasant way in which she carried her head, or, perhaps, her shoulders—or, perhaps, her head and shoulders together. Not that his opinion was good for much in matters of this kind, for which reason he begged to apologise for expressing

it." In speaking thus, the worthy engraver surely depreciated himself unjustly; for, if the father of eight daughters cannot learn (philoprogenitively speaking) to be a good judge of women, what man can?

However, there was one point on which Mr. Gimble, Lady Brambledown, Mr. Bullivant, Mrs. Blyth's father, and hosts of friends were all agreed.

They unanimous asserted that the young lady's face was the nearest living approach ever seen to that immortal "Madonna" face, which has for ever associated the idea of beauty with the name of Raphael. The resemblance struck everybody the moment they saw her. Taken in detail, her features might be found fault with. Her eyes might be pronounced too large, her mouth too small, her nose not Grecian enough for some people. But the general effect of these features, the shape of her head and face, and especially her habitual expression, reminded all irresistibly, of that image of softness, purity, and gentleness, engraven on all civilised memories by the "Madonnas" of Raphael.

It was in consequence of this extraordinary resemblance that her name of Mary had been, from the first, Italianised by Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, and all intimate friends, into "Madonna." One or two strict and foolish people objected to any such familiar application of this name, as open to an imputation of irreverence. Mr. Blyth was not generally quick at an answer; but, on this occasion, he had three answers ready.

In the first place, he said that he used the name only in an artist-sense, and only with reference to Raphael's pictures. In the next, he showed that "Madonna" had a second meaning, signifying literally, "My lady." And, in conclusion, he proved that "Madonna" had been used in old times as a prefix to the names of Italian women; quoting "Madonna Pia," whom he happened to remember at that moment, from having once painted a picture from one of the scenes of her terrible story. These statements silenced all objections; and the young lady was much better known as "Madonna" than as "Mary."

On now entering the studio, she walked up to Valentine, laid a hand lightly on each shoulder, and so lifted herself to be kissed. Then she looked down on his palette, and observing that some colours were missing began to search for them. She found them in a moment, and appealed to Mr. Blyth with an

arch look of triumph. He nodded, smiled, and held out his palette for her to put the colours on it. Having done this, she next looked round the room, and observed the bust of Venus on the office stool.

At the same time, Mr. Blyth, who saw the direction taken by her eyes, handed her a port-crayon with some black chalk, which he had been carefully cutting to a point. She took it with a little mock curtsey, pouting slightly, as if drawing the Venus was work not to her taste—smiled when she saw Valentine shaking his head, and frowning comically—then went at once to the drawing-board, and sat opposite Venus, in which position she offered as decided a living contradiction as ever was seen to the assertion of the classical idea of beauty, as expressed in the cast she was about to copy.

Mr. Blyth set to work at last on the Landscape painting upon the dancing Bacchantes in the foreground, whose scanty dresses stood sadly in need of brightening up. While the painter and the young lady are thus industriously occupied there is leisure to remark on one perplexing characteristic of their intercourse, so far as it has yet proceeded on this particular morning.

Ever since Madonna has been in the room, not one word has she spoken; and not one word has Valentine (who can talk glibly enough to himself, spoken to her. He never said "Good morning," or "Thank you for finding my lost colours." And she has not asked him a single question since she entered. What can this remarkable silence mean between two people who look as affectionately on each other as these two look, every time their eyes meet!

CHAPTER III.

MADONNA'S CHILDHOOD.

In the autumn of 1838, Mrs. Blyth's malady had for some time assumed the permanent form from which it seldom afterwards varied. She now suffered little pain, except when she quitted a recumbent posture. But the general disorganisation produced by almost exclusive confinement to one position, had begun to work sad changes in her personal appearance. She suffered that mortifying misfortune as bravely and resignedly as she had suffered the first great calamity of her incurable dis-

order. Valentine never showed that he thought her altered; Valentine's kindness was just as constant as it had ever been in the happier days of their marriage. So encouraged, Lavinia had the heart to bear all patiently; and could find sources of happiness, where others could discover nothing but causes for grief.

The room she inhabited was already better furnished than any other room in the house; but was far from presenting the same appearance of completeness to which it attained in after years.

The maple-wood and ivory bookcase, with the prettily-bound volumes ranged in bright regularity along its shelves, was there certainly. It would not, however, at that time have formed part of the furniture of Mrs. Blyth's room, if her husband had not provided himself with the means of paying for it, by accepting a certain professional invitation to the country, which he knew would enable him to face the terrors of the upholsterer's bill.

The invitation had been sent by a clerical friend, the Reverend Doctor Joyce, Rector of St. Judy's in the agricultural town of Rubbleford. Valentine had produced a water-colour drawing of one of the Doctor's babies, when the family at the Rectory were in London, and this had been shown to the neighbours by the worthy clergyman on his return. Now, although Mr. Blyth was not over-successful in the adult department of portrait-art, he was invariably victorious in the infant department. He painted all babies on one plan; giving them the roundest eyes, the chubbiest cheeks, the most serenely good-humoured smiles, and the whitest caps ever seen. If fathers and their male friends rarely appreciated his likenesses, mothers and nurses made amends for their want of taste. It followed, as a matter of course, that the local exhibition of the Doctor's drawing must bring offers of long-clothes portrait employment to Valentine. Three families decided to have portraits of their babies, if the painter would only travel to their houses to take the likenesses. A sporting squire volunteered a commission of another sort. This gentleman arrived (by a logical process hopeless to think of tracing) at the conclusion, that a man, great at babies, must be marvellous at horses; and determined that Valentine should paint his cover-hack. In writing to inform his friend of these offers, Doctor Joyce added another professional order on his own account, by way of conclusion to his letter. Here were five commissions, which would produce

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enough to pay, not only for the bookcase, but for books to put in it when it came home.

Having left his wife in charge of two of her sisters, Mr. Blyth started for the rectory; and once there set to work on the babies with a zeal which won the hearts of mothers and nurses, and made him a great Rubbleford reputation in a few days. Having done the babies to admiration, he next undertook the squire's hack. Here he had trouble. The sporting gentleman would look over him while he painted; would bewilder him with the pedigree of the horse; would have the animal done in the most unpicturesque view; and forbade all introduction of "tone," "light and shade," or artistic embellishment of any kind. The squire wanted a sign-board instead of a picture, and at last got what he wanted to his heart's content.

One evening, while Valentine—still immersed in the difficulties of depicting the cover-hack—was returning to the Rectory, after a day's work at the Squire's, his attention was attracted by a placard pasted up on a wall opposite the market-house.

He immediately joined the crowd congregated around the many-coloured sheet of paper, and read at the top, in huge blue letters:—"Jubber's Circus. The Eighth Wonder of the World." After this came some small print, which nobody lost time in noticing. But below the small print appeared a galaxy of scarlet letters, which informed the public that the equestrian company included "Miss Florinda Beverley, known" (here the letters turned suddenly green) "wherever the English language was known, as The Amazonian Empress of Equitation." This announcement was followed by the names of inferior members of the company; by a programme of the evening's entertainments; by testimonials from the Press; by illustrations of gentlemen with lusty calves and spangled drawers, and of ladies with smiling faces, shameless petticoats, and pirouetting legs. These illustrations, and the particulars which preceded them were carefully digested by all Mr. Blyth's neighbours; but Mr. Blyth passed them over unnoticed. His eye had been caught by something at the bottom of the placard, which instantly absorbed his attention.

THE MYSTERIOUS FOUNDLING!

AGED TEN YEARS!!

TOTALLY DEAF AND DUMB!!!

Underneath came an explanation, occupying three paragraphs

of stumpy small print, every word of which Valentine eagerly devoured. This is what he read:—

“Mr. Jubber has the honour of informing the nobility, gentry, and public, that the above wonderful Deaf and Dumb Female Child will appear between the first and second parts of the evening's performances. Mr. J. has taken the liberty of entitling this Marvel of Nature, The Mysterious Foundling; no one knowing who her father is, and her mother having died soon after her birth, leaving her in charge of the Equestrian Company, who have been careful guardians to her ever since.

“She was originally celebrated in the annals of Jubber's Circus, or Eighth Wonder of the World, as The Hurricane Child of the Desert; having appeared in that character, whirled aloft at the age of seven in the hand of Muley Ben Hassan, the renowned Scourer of Sahara, in his daring act of Equitation, as exhibited to the terror of all England, in Jubber's Circus. At that time she had her hearing and speech perfect. But Mr. J. regrets to state that a terrific accident happened to her soon afterwards. Through no fault of The Scourer (who, overcome by the result of the above-mentioned accident, has gone back to his native wilds a broken-hearted man), she slipped from his hand while the three horses, bestrode by the fiery Arab, were going at a gallop, and fell, shocking to relate, outside the Ring, on the floor of the Circus. She was supposed to be dead. Mr. Jubber instantly secured the inestimable assistance of the Faculty, who found that she was still alive, and set her arm, which had been broken. It was afterwards discovered that she had utterly lost her sense of hearing. To use the emphatic language of the medical gentlemen (who all spoke with tears in their eyes), she had been struck stone deaf by the shock. Under these melancholy circumstances, it was found that speech soon failed her altogether, and she is now Totally Deaf and Dumb—but Mr. J. rejoices to say, quite cheerful and in good health notwithstanding.

“Mr. Jubber, being himself the father of a family, ventures to think that these particulars may prove of interest to an Intelligent, a Sympathetic, and a Benevolent Public. He will simply allude, in conclusion, to the performance of the Mysterious Foundling, as exhibiting perfection unparalleled in the Art of Legerdemain, with wonders of untraceable intricacy on the cards, the result of abstruse calculations made by that

renowned Algebraist, Mohammed Engedi, extending over a period of ten years, dating from the year 1215 of the Arab Chronology. More than this Mr. Jubber will not mention, for 'Seeing is Believing,' and the Mysterious Foundling must be seen to be believed. For prices of admission consult bill."

Mr. Blyth read this grotesquely shocking narrative with sentiments which were anything rather than complimentary to the taste, delicacy, and humanity of Mr. Jubber. He consulted the bill, as requested; and ascertained what were the prices of admission—then glanced at the top, and observed that the first performance was fixed for that evening—looked about absently for a minute or two—and resolved to be present.

Valentine's resolution did not proceed from that dastard insensibility to decent respect for human suffering which could feast on the spectacle of calamity paraded for hire, in the person of a deaf and dumb child of ten. His motives for going to the circus were stained by such degradation as this. But what were they? That question he himself could not have answered; it was a common predicament with him not to know his own motives, generally from not inquiring into them. There are men who run breathlessly—men who walk cautiously—and men who saunter through life. Valentine belonged to the latter; and, like the rest of his order, often strayed down a new turning, without being able to realise what purpose took him that way. Our destinies shape the future for us out of strange materials: a travelling circus sufficed them to shape a new future for Mr. Blyth.

The performances had begun some time when he got in. The Amazonian Empress (known as Miss Florinda Beverley) was dancing voluptuously on the back of a cantering piebald horse with a Roman nose. Round and round careered the Empress, beating time on the saddle with her imperial legs to the tune of "Let the Toast be Dear Woman," played with feeling by the band. Suddenly the melody changed to "See the Conquering Hero comes"; the piebald horse increased his speed; the Empress raised a flag in one hand, and a javelin in the other, and began slaying invisible enemies in the empty air, at full (circus) gallop. The result on the audience was prodigious; Mr. Blyth sat unmoved. Miss Florinda Beverley was not even a good model to draw legs from, in the estimation of this anti-Amazonian painter!

When the Empress was succeeded by a Spanish Guerilla, who robbed, murdered, danced, caroused, and made love on the back of a cream-coloured horse—and when the Guerilla was followed by a clown who performed superhuman contortions, and made jokes by the yard, without the slightest appearance of effort—still Mr. Blyth exhibited no demonstration of astonishment. It was only when a bell rang between the first and second parts of the performance, and the band struck up "Gentle Zitella," that he showed symptoms of animation. Then he rose; and, moving down to a bench against the low partition which separated the ring from the audience, fixed his eyes on a doorway opposite, overhung by a red curtain.

From this doorway now appeared Mr. Jubber, clothed in white trowsers with a gold stripe, and a green jacket with military epaulettes. He had a dyed moustache, great, flabby cheeks, long hair parted in the middle, a turn-down collar with a rose-coloured handkerchief; and was, in every respect, the most atrocious looking stage vagabond that ever painted a blackguard dumb girl.

The face and manner of the child, as she walked into the centre of the circus, and made her innocent curtsy and kissed her hand, went to the hearts of the audience. They greeted her with such a burst of applause as might have frightened a grown actress. But not a note from those cheering voices, not a sound from those loudly clapping hands could reach her; she could see they were welcoming her, and that was all!

face. He led with him, holding her hand, the little deaf and When the applause subsided, Mr. Jubber asked for the loan of a handkerchief from one of the ladies, and ostentatiously bandaged the child's eyes. He then lifted her upon the broad low wall which encircled the ring, and walked her round a little way, inviting the spectators to test her deafness by clapping their hands, shouting, or making any noise close at her ear. "You might fire off a cannon," said Mr. Jubber, "and it wouldn't make her start till after she'd smelt the smoke!"

To the credit of the audience, the majority declined making practical experiments to test the child's utter deafness. The women set the example of forbearance, by entreating that the handkerchief might be taken off, so that they might see her pretty eyes. This was done, and she began to perform her conjuring tricks with Mr. Jubber and one of the ring-keepers on

either side of her, officiating as assistants. These tricks were of the simplest; and derived their attraction from the child's innocently earnest manner, and from the novelty to the audience of communicating with her only by writing on a slate. They never tired of scrawling questions, of saying "poor little thing!" and of kissing her whenever they could get the opportunity, while she slowly went round the circus. "Deaf and dumb! ah, dear, deaf and dumb!" was the murmur of sympathy which greeted her from each new group; Mr. Jubber invariably adding with a smile: "And as you see, ladies and gentlemen, in excellent health and spirits, hearty and happy, I pledge you my word, as the best of us!"

While she was thus delighting the spectators on one side of the circus, how were the spectators, whose places she had not yet reached, contriving to amuse themselves?

From the moment of the little girl's first appearance, ample recreation had been provided for them by a tall, stout, florid stranger, who appeared to lose his senses the moment he set eyes on the deaf and dumb child. This gentleman jumped up and sat down again excitably a dozen times; constantly apologizing on being called to order, and constantly repeating the offence the moment afterwards. Mad and mysterious words, never heard before in Rubbleford, poured from his lips. "Devotional beauty," "Fra Angelico's angels," "Giotto and the cherubs," "Enough to bring the divine Raphael down from heaven." Such were fragments of the mad gentleman's mutterings, as they reached his neighbours' ears. The amusement they yielded was wrought to its climax by a joke from an attorney's clerk, who suggested that this queer man must be the long-lost father of the "Mysterious Foundling!" Great gratification was anticipated from what might take place when the child arrived opposite the bench occupied by the stranger.

Slowly the little figure went round upon the broad partition wall of the ring, until it came near, very near, to the place where Valentine was sitting.

Ah, woful sight! so lovely, yet so piteous to look on! Shall she never hear kindly human voices, the song of birds, the pleasant murmur of the trees again? Are all the sweet sounds that sing of happiness, silent for ever to her? From those fresh, rosy lips, shall no glad words pour forth, when she plays in the sunshine. Shall the clear, laughing tones be hushed always? the young, tender life be for ever a speechless thing,

shut up in dumbness? Oh! Angel of judgment! hast thou snatched hearing and speech from this little child, to abandon her in helpless affliction to such profanation? Oh, Spirit of mercy! how long thy white-winged feet have tarried on their way to this innocent sufferer, to this lost lamb that cannot cry for help! Lead, ah, lead her tenderly to such shelter as she has never yet found! Guide her, pure as she is now, from this tainted place to pleasant pastures, where the sunshine of human kindness shall be clouded no more, and Love and Pity shall temper every wind that blows over her with the gentleness of perpetual spring! •

Slowly the light figure went round the circle of gazers, ministering to their pleasure, waiting patiently till their curiosity was satisfied. And now, her weary pilgrimage was well nigh over for the night. She had arrived at the last group of spectators, who had yet to see what she looked like, and what tricks she could exhibit with her cards.

She stopped opposite to Valentine; and when she looked up, she looked on him alone.

Was there something in the sympathy of his eyes as they met hers, which spoke to the little lonely heart in the sole language that could reach it? Did the child, with the quick instinct of the deaf and dumb, read his compassionate disposition, his pity and longing to help her, in his expression at that moment? It might have been so. Her pretty lips smiled on him as they had smiled on no one that night; and when she held out some cards to be chosen from, she left unnoticed the eager hands extended on either side, and presented them to Valentine only.

He saw the small fingers trembling as they held the cards; he saw the delicate little shoulders and the poor frail neck and chest bedizened with tawdry mock jewelry; he saw the innocent young face, whose beauty no soil of stage paint could disfigure, with the smile still on the parted lips, but with a patient forlornness in the sad eyes, as if the seeing sense that was left, mourned for the hearing and speaking senses that were gone—he marked all these things in an instant, and felt his heart sinking. A dimness stole over his sight; a suffocating sensation oppressed his breathing; the lights in the circus danced and mingled; he bent over the child's hand, and took it in his own; twice kissed it; then, to the amazement of the laughing crowd, rose suddenly, and forced his way out as if flying for his life.

There was a momentary confusion among the audience. But

Mr. Jubber was too old an adept in stage-business not to know how to stop the tumult, and turn it into universal applause.

"Ladies and gentleman," he cried, with a theatrical quiver in his voice—"I implore you to be seated, and excuse the conduct of the party who has just absented himself. The talent of the Mysterious Foundling has overcome people in that way in every town of England. Do I err in believing that a Rubbleford audience can make kind allowances for their weaker fellow-creatures? Thanks, a thousand thanks, in the name of this darling and talented child, for your cordial, your generous, your inestimable reception to-night!" With this Mr. Jubber took his pupil out of the ring, amid vehement cheering and waving of hats and handkerchiefs. He was too excited by his triumph to notice that the child, as she walked after him, looked wistfully in the direction by which Valentine had gone out.

"The public like excitement," soliloquised Mr. Jubber, as he disappeared behind the red curtain. "I must have all this in the bills to-morrow. It's safe to draw at least thirty shillings extra into the house."

In the meantime, Valentine, after blundering at wrong doors, at last found his way out of the circus. He struck his stick violently on the ground, which at that moment represented to him the head of Mr. Jubber; and was about to return straight to the rectory, when he heard a breathless voice calling: "Stop, sir! please stop for one minute!"

He turned. A buxom woman in a tawdry and tattered gown was running towards him as fast as natural impediments to quick progression would permit.

"Please, sir," she cried, "wasn't you the gentleman that was taken queer at seeing our little Foundling? I was peeping through the curtain, sir, at the time."

Instead of answering, Valentine began to rhapsodise about the child's face.

"Oh, sir! if you know anything about her," interposed the woman, "for God's sake tell me! I'm only Mrs. Peckover, sir, the wife of Jemmy Peckover, the clown. But I took and nursed the little thing by her mother's wish; and ever since that time—"

"My dear soul," said Mr. Blyth, "I know nothing of the poor little creature. I only wish from the bottom of my heart that I could do something to help her. If Lavvie and I had had such an angel as that," continued Valentine, clasping his hands

fervently, "deaf and dumb as she is, we should have thanked God for her every day of our lives!"

Mrs. Peckover was apparently not used to hear such sentiments from strangers. She stared at Mr. Blyth with two tears rolling over her plump cheeks.

"Mrs. Peckover! Hullo, Peck! where are you?" roared a stern voice from the stable department of the circus, as the clown's wife seemed about to speak again.

Mrs. Peckover started, curtsied, and, without another word, went back even faster than she had come. Valentine made no attempt to follow; he was thinking too much of the child to think of that. When he moved again, it was to return to the rectory.

He penetrated at once into the library, where Doctor Joyce was spelling over the "Rubbleford Mercury," while Mrs. Joyce sat opposite, knitting a fancy jacket for her youngest but one. He was hardly inside the door before he began to expatiate in the wildest manner on the beautiful deaf and dumb girl. If ever man was in love with a child at first sight, he was. As an artist, as a gentleman of refined tastes, and as the softest-hearted of male human beings, in all three capacities, he was enslaved by that little, innocent face. He made the Doctor's head whirl, he stopped Mrs. Joyce's progress with the fancy jacket, as he sang the child's praises, and compared her face to every angel's face ever painted. At last, when he had exhausted his hearers and himself, he dashed out of the room to cool his excitement by a moonlight walk.

"What a very odd man he is!" said Mrs. Joyce, taking up a dropped stitch.

"Valentine is the best creature in the world," rejoined the doctor, "but, as I often used to tell his father (who never would believe me), a little cracked. I've known him go on in this way about children before—though I must own, not so wildly, as he talked just now."

"Do you think he'll do anything imprudent about the child? Poor thing! I pity her as heartily as anybody."

"I don't presume to think," answered the doctor. "Valentine is one of those who defy all conjecture. No one can say what he will do, or what he won't. A man who cannot resist an application for shelter and supper from any stray cur who wags his tail at him in the street; a man who believes in the troubles of begging-letter impostors; a man whom I myself caught, last

time he was here, playing at marbles with three of my charity-boys, and promising to treat them to ginger-beer afterwards, is—in short, is not a man whose actions it is possible to speculate on."

Here the door opened, and Mr. Blyth's head was popped in, surmounted by a ragged straw hat with a sky-blue ribbon.

"Doctor," said Valentine, "may I ask an excellent woman, with whom I have made acquaintance, to bring the child here to-morrow morning for you and Mrs. Joyce to see?"

"Certainly," said the good-humoured rector, laughing. "The child by all means, and the excellent woman too."

"Not if it's Miss Florinda Beverley!" interposed Mrs. Joyce (who had read the Circus placard). "Florinda, indeed! Jezebel would be a better name!"

"My dear Madam, it isn't Florinda," cried Valentine, eagerly. I agree with you; her name ought to be Jezebel. And, what's worse, her legs are out of drawing."

"Mr. Blyth!" exclaimed Mrs. Joyce, indignant at this professional criticism on Jezebel's legs.

"Why don't you tell us who the excellent woman is?" cried the doctor, secretly tickled by the allusion which shocked his wife.

"Her name's Peckover," said Valentine; "she's a respectable married woman; she doesn't ride in the circus, and she nursed the poor child by her mother's wish."

"We shall be delighted to see her," said the rector—"or no—stop! Not to-morrow; I shall be out. The day after. Cake and cowslip wine at twelve—eh, my dear?"

"That's right! God bless you! you're always kindness itself," cried Valentine; "I'll find out Mrs. Peckover, and let her know. Not a wink of sleep for me to-night—never mind!" Here Valentine suddenly shut the door, then opened it again, and added, "I mean to finish that infernal horse picture to-morrow, and go to the circus again in the evening." With these words he vanished; and they heard him soon afterwards whistling in the rectory garden.

"Cracked! cracked!" cried the doctor. "Dear old Valentine!"

"I'm afraid his principles are loose," said Mrs. Joyce, whose thoughts still ran on the unlucky allusion to Jezebel's legs.

The next morning, when Mr. Blyth presented himself at the

stables, and went on with the portrait of the cover-hack, the squire had no longer reason to complain of the painter's desire to combine picturesqueness of effect with accuracy of resemblance. Valentine argued no longer about introducing "light and shade," or "keeping the background subdued in tone." His thoughts were with the deaf and dumb child and Mrs. Peckover; and he smudged away recklessly, just as he was told, without uttering a word of protest. By the evening he had concluded. The squire said it was one of the best portraits of a horse ever taken; to which criticism the writer is bound in candour to add, that it was the very worst picture that Mr. Blyth ever painted.

On returning to Rubbleford, Valentine proceeded at once to the circus; placing himself, as nearly as he could, in the same position which he had occupied the night before.

The child was again applauded by the audience, and again went through her performance gracefully, until she approached the place where Valentine was. She started as she recognised his face, and made a step forward to get nearer to him; but was stopped by Mr. Jubber, who saw that people in front of her were holding out their hands to write on her slate, and have cards dealt to them in turn. The child's attention appeared to be distracted by seeing the stranger again who had kissed her hand—she began to look confused—and ended by committing a palpable blunder in the first trick.

The spectators good-naturedly laughed, and some wrote on her slate, "Try again." Mr. Jubber made an apology, saying that the enthusiasm of the reception accorded to his pupil had shaken her nerves; and then signed to her, with a benevolent smile, but with a sinister expression in his eyes, to try another trick. She succeeded in this, but showed so much hesitation, that Mr. Jubber, fearing another failure, took her away while there was a chance of making a creditable exit.

As she was led across the ring, the child looked at Valentine.

There was terror in her eyes—terror palpable enough to be remarked by some of the people near Mr. Blyth. "Poor thing! she seems frightened at the man," said one. "And not without cause, I dare say," added another. "You don't mean that he could be brute enough to ill use a child like that?" cried a third.

At this moment the clown entered the ring. The instant

before he shouted the well-known "Here we are!" Valentine thought he heard a cry behind the curtain. He was not certain, but the mere doubt made his blood run chill. He listened anxiously. There was no chance now for testing the correctness of his suspicion. The band had struck up a noisy tune, and the clown was capering and tumbling, amid roars of laughter.

"This may be my fault," thought Valentine. "This! What?" He was afraid to pursue that inquiry. His ruddy face turned pale, and he left the circus, determined to find out what was going on behind the curtain.

He walked round the outside of the building, wasting time before he found a door to apply at for admission. At last he came to a passage, with tattered horse-cloths hanging over its outer entrance.

"You can't come in," said a shabby lad, suddenly appearing in his shirt sleeves.

Mr. Blyth took out half-a-crown. "I want to see the deaf and dumb child directly!"

"Oh, all right! go in," muttered the lad, pocketing the money.

Valentine entered the passage. As soon as he was inside, a sound reached his ears at which his heart sickened. No words can describe it in the horror of its helplessness—it was the moan of pain from a dumb human creature.

He thrust aside a curtain, and stood in a filthy place, partitioned off from the stables on one side, and the circus on the other, with canvas and boards. There, on a stool, sat the woman who had accosted him the night before, crying, and soothing the child, who lay shuddering on her bosom. The sobs of the clown's wife mingled with the inarticulate wailing, so awful to hear; and both sounds were audible with unnatural distinctness, through the merry melody and the peals of laughter from the audience.

"Oh, my God!" cried Valentine, horror-struck, "stop her; don't let her moan in that way!"

The woman started from her seat, and put the child down, then recognised Mr. Blyth and rushed up to him.

"Hush!" she whispered; "don't call out like that. The brutal villain is somewhere about the stables. If he hears you, he'll beat her again. Oh, hush! for God's sake! It's true he

beat her—the cowardly brute!—only for making that little mistake with the cards. No! no! don't speak so loud. How did you get in? Oh! you must be quiet! Hark! I'm sure he's coming! Oh! go away—go away!”

She tried to pull Valentine out of the chair into which she had thrust him but the instant before. He seized her hand and refused to move. If Mr. Jubber had come in he would have been thrashed within an inch of his life.

The child had ceased moaning when she saw Valentine. She anxiously looked at him through her tears—then turned away—took out her little handkerchief, and began to dry her eyes.

“I can't go yet—I'll promise only to whisper—you must listen,” said Mr. Blyth, panting for breath; “I mean to prevent this from happening again—don't speak!—I'll take that beautiful, patient little angel away from this place; I will, if I go before a magistrate!”

The woman stopped him by pointing to the child.

She had put back the handkerchief, and was approaching him. She came close and laid one hand on his knee, and timidly raised the other as high as she could towards his neck. Standing so, she looked up into his face. The pretty lips tried to smile, but only trembled for an instant, and closed again. The clear, soft eyes, dim with tears, sought his with an innocent gaze of wonder. At that moment the expression of the sad little face seemed to say—“You look as if you wanted to be kind; I wish you could find some way of telling me.”

Valentine's heart told him the only way. He caught her in his arms, and half smothered her with kisses. The childish hands rose trembling, and clasped themselves gently round his neck; and the fair head drooped lower and lower, until it lay on his shoulder.

The clown's wife turned away her face, stifling with both hands the sobs beginning to burst from her afresh. She whispered, “Oh, go, sir,—pray go! Some of the riders will be here directly; you'll get us into trouble!”

Valentine rose, still holding the child. “I'll go if you promise—”

“I'll promise anything, sir!”

“You know the rectory! Doctor Joyce's—the clergyman—”

“Yes, sir; I know it. Do please, for little Mary's sake be as quick as you can!”

"Mary! Her name's Mary!" Valentine drew back into a corner, and began kissing the child again.

"You must be out of your senses to keep on in that way after and trying to drag him out of the corner. "Jubber will be here what I've told you!" cried the clown's wife, wringing her hands, in a minute. She'll be beaten again, if you're caught; oh, Lord! oh, Lord! will nothing make you understand?"

He understood it only too well, and put the child down instantly, his face turning pale again; his agitation becoming so violent that he never noticed the hand held out towards him, or the appealing look that said so pathetically: "I want to bid you good-bye; but I can't say it as other children can." He never observed this; for he had taken Mrs. Peckover by the arm, and had drawn her away into the passage.

The child made no attempt to follow; she turned aside, and, sitting down in the darkest corner of the miserable place, rested her head against the rough partition which divided her from the laughing audience. Her lips began to tremble; she took out the handkerchief once more, and hid her face in it.

"Recollect your promise," whispered Valentine to the clown's wife, who was slowly pushing him out all the time he was speaking. "Bring little Mary to the Rectory to-morrow morning at twelve exactly, or I'll come and fetch her myself—"

"I'll bring her, sir. I will, as true as I stand here!"

"If you don't," cried Valentine, still distrustful, and trembling with agitation—"if you don't—"

He stopped; for he felt the open air blowing on his face. The clown's wife was gone, and nothing remained for him to threaten, but the tattered horse-cloths that hung over the empty doorway.

CHAPTER IV.

MADONNA'S MOTHER.

It is a quarter to twelve by the hall clock. Vance, Doctor Joyce's middle-aged man servant, or "Bishop" Vance, as the wits of Rubbleford call him, in allusion to his solemn appearance, his clerical cravat, and black garments, is placing the cake and cowslip wine on the dining-table, with as much formality as if his master expected an archbishop instead of a

clown's wife and a child of ten. It is a sight to see Vance retiring, and looking at the effect of each knife and fork as he lays it down; or strutting about the room, with a spotless napkin in his hand; or patronisingly confronting the housemaid at the door, taking plates and dishes from her with the air of a kitchen Sultan who can never afford to lose his dignity in the presence of the female slaves.

Valentine has let nobody have any rest, since the first thing in the morning. The rector having letters to write, has bolted himself into his study in despair, and defies his excitable friend from that stronghold, until the arrival of Mrs. Peckover with the deaf and dumb child has quieted the painter's fidgety impatience for the striking of twelve. As for the miserable Vance, Mr. Blyth has worried, and put him out, till he looks suffocated with suppressed indignation. Mr. Blyth has invaded his sanctuary to ask whether the hall clock is right, and has caught him "cleaning himself" in his shirt sleeves. Mr. Blyth has broken one of his tumblers, and mutinously insisted on showing him how to draw the cork of the cowslip wine bottle. Mr. Blyth has knocked down a fork and two spoons, just as they were laid straight, by whisking past the table like a madman on his way into the garden. Mr. Blyth has bumped up against the housemaid in returning to the dining-room, and has apologised by a joke which makes her giggle in Vance's own face. If this sort of thing is to go on, though he has been twenty years at the Rectory, Vance will be goaded into giving warning.

It is five minutes to twelve. Valentine has skipped into the garden for the thirtieth time, to beg that Mrs. Joyce and the young ladies will repair to the dining-room, and be ready to set Mrs. Peckover and her charge quite at ease the moment they come in. Mrs. Joyce consents and takes his offered arm; touching it, however, gingerly, and looking straight before her, while he talks, with an air of dignity and virtuous reserve. She is still convinced that Mr. Blyth's principles are loose, and treats him as she might have treated Don Juan under similar circumstances.

They all go into the dining-room. Mrs. Joyce and her daughters take their places, looking cool and neat in their bright morning dresses. Leo drops down lazily on the rug, with a thump of his heavy body that makes the glasses ring. The doctor comes in with his letters for the post, and apostrophises

Valentine with a harmless clerical joke. Vance solemnly touches up the already perfect arrangement of the luncheon table. The clock strikes twelve. A meek ring is heard at the bell.

Vance struts slowly to the door, when—Heaven and earth! are no conventions held sacred by painters?—Mr. Blyth dashes past him with a shout of "Here they are!" and flies to answer the gate himself. Vance turns solemnly round towards his master, purple in the face, with an appealing expression, which says, plainly: "If you mean to stand this sort of outrage, sir, I beg most respectfully to inform you that I don't." The rector bursts out laughing; the young ladies follow his example; the Newfoundland dog joins in with his mighty bark. Mrs. Joyce is silent, and looks at Vance, and sympathises with him.

Mr. Blyth is soon heard in the hall, talking at a prodigious rate, without one audible word of answer proceeding from any other voice. The door of the dining-room is suddenly pushed open, jostling the outraged Vance, who stands near it, into such a miserably undignified position flat against the wall, that the young ladies begin to titter. Valentine enters, leading Mrs. Peckover and the deaf and dumb child, with such an air of happiness, that he looks absolutely handsome. The rector receives Mrs. Peckover as politely as he would have received the best lady in Rubbleford. Mrs. Joyce comes forward with him, very kind too, but a little reserved in her manner; being possibly apprehensive that any woman connected with the circus must be tainted with some slight favour of Miss Florinda Beverley. The young ladies drop down into the most charming positions on either side of the child, and fall straightaway into ecstasy over her beauty. The dog walks up, and pokes his great honest muzzle among them companionably. Vance stands rigid against the wall, and disapproves of the whole proceeding.

Poor Mrs. Peckover! She had never been in such a house as the Rectory, had never spoken to a doctor of divinity before in her life. She was hot and red and trembling, and made fearful mistakes in grammar, and clung as shyly to Mr. Blyth as if she had been a girl. The rector soon contrived, however, to settle her comfortably in a seat by the table. She curtsied reverentially to Vance, as she passed him; doubtless under the impression that he was a second doctor of divinity, greater and more learned than the first. He stared in return straight

over her head, with small unwinking eyes, his cheeks turning slowly from deep red to dense purple. Mrs. Peckover shuddered, under the conviction that she had insulted a dignitary, hoisted up on some clerical elevation, too tremendous to be curtseyed to by such a social atom as a clown's wife.

Mrs. Joyce had to call three times to her daughters before she could get them to the luncheon-table. If she had possessed Valentine's eye for the picturesque, she would certainly have been incapable of disturbing the group which her third summons broke up.

In the centre stood the deaf and dumb child, in a white frock, with a little silk mantilla over it, made from a cast-off garment belonging to one of the ladies of the circus. She wore a plain straw hat, ornamented with a morsel of white ribbon, and tied under the chin with the same material. Her delicate complexion was overspread by a slight, rosy tinge—the tender colouring of nature, instead of the glaring rouge with which they disfigured her when she appeared before the public. Her wondering eyes, that looked so sad in the piercing gas-light, appeared to have lost that sadness in the mellow atmosphere of the dining-room. The touching stillness which her affliction had cast over her face, seemed at variance with its childish immaturity of feature and roundness of form, but harmonised exquisitely with the quiet smile which seemed habitual to her when happy—gratefully and unrestrainedly happy, as she now felt among the new friends who were receiving her, not like a stranger and an inferior, but like a younger sister who had been long absent.

She stood near the window, the centre of the group, offering a little slate that hung by her side, with a pencil attached, to the rector's eldest daughter, who was sitting at her right hand. The second of the young ladies knelt on the other side, with both arms round the dog's neck; holding him back as he stood in front of the child, so as to prevent him from licking her face, which he had made several attempts to do, from the moment she entered. Both the Doctor's daughters were rosy English beauties in the first bloom of girlhood. Pity and admiration, mixed with perplexity and confusion, gave unusual animation to their expressions; for they could hardly accustom themselves to the idea of the child's calamity. They talked to her eagerly, as if she could hear and answer—while she, on her part, stood

looking from one to the other, watching their lips and eyes, and still holding out the slate, with her innocent gesture of invitation for the eldest girl to write. The varying expressions of the three; the difference in their positions; the contrast between their light, graceful figures and the bulky strength and solidity of form in the noble Newfoundland dog who stood among them; the lustrous background of lawn and flowers and trees, seen through the open window; the sparkling sunshine which fell brightly over one part of the group; the transparency of the warm shadows that lay caressingly, sometimes on a round smooth cheek, sometimes over ringlets of glistening hair, sometimes on the crisp folds of a muslin dress—all these accidental combinations, these natural and elegant positions of nature's setting, these accessories of light and shade and background garden objects beautifully and tenderly filling up the scene, presented a picture which it was a luxury to look on, which it seemed little short of profanation to disturb.

Mrs. Joyce, nevertheless, pitilessly disarranged it. In a moment the living picture was destroyed; the young ladies were called to their mother's side; the child was placed between Valentine and Mrs. Peckover, and the important business of luncheon began.

It was wonderful to hear how Mr. Blyth talked; how he alternately glorified the clown's wife for punctual performance of her promise, and appealed to the rector to say, whether he had not underrated rather than exaggerated little Mary's beauty. It was wonderful to see Mrs. Peckover's look of astonishment when she found the rigid doctor of divinity, who would not notice her curtsy, supplying her with everything she wanted to eat or drink. But a much more remarkably study of human nature than either, was afforded by the grimly patronising and profoundly puzzled aspect of Vance, as he waited upon a woman from a travelling circus. It is something to see the Pope serving the Pilgrims their dinner, during the Holy Week at Rome. Even that sight, however, fades into nothing, as compared with the spectacle of Mr. Vance waiting upon Mrs. Peckover.

The rector, a sharp observer in his own quiet way, was struck by two peculiarities in little Mary's behaviour. In the first place, he remarked with astonishment, that while the clown's wife was, not unnaturally, shy and embarrassed among strangers

who were her social superiors, little Mary maintained her self-possession, and unconsciously adapted herself to her new sphere from the moment she first entered. In the second place, he observed that she nestled close to Valentine; looked at him oftener than at anyone else; and seemed always trying, sometimes not unsuccessfully, to guess what he was saying to others by watching his expression, and the action of his lips. "That child's character is no common one," thought Doctor Joyce; "she is older at heart than she looks; and almost as fond of Blyth already as he is of her."

When lunch was over, the eldest Miss Joyce whispered a petition in her mother's ear, "May Carry and I take the little girl with us to see our gardens, mamma?"

"Certainly, my love, if she likes to go. You had better ask her—Ah, dear! dear! I forgot—I mean, write on her slate. It's hard to remember she's deaf and dumb, when one sees her sitting there so pretty and happy.

Emily and Caroline went to the child directly, and made signs for the slate. They alternately wrote on it with immense enthusiasm, until they had filled one side; signing their initials in business-like manner at the end of each line, thus:—

"Oh, do come and see my gardens. E. J."—"We will gather you a nice nosegay. C. J."—"I have got some lovely guineapigs. E. J."—"And Mark, our gardener, has made me a summer-house, with such funny chairs. C. J."—"You shall have my parasol to keep the sun off. E. J."—"And we will send Leo into the water as often as you like. C. J."—Thus they went on till they got to the bottom of the slate.

The child, after nodding and smiling as she read each invitation, turned the slate over, and, with some little triumph at showing that she could write too, began slowly to trace large text letters in extremely crooked lines. It took her a long time—especially as Mr. Blyth was breathlessly looking over her shoulder—to get through these words: "Thank you for being so kind. I will go anywhere you like."

Valentine started up to follow them; then appeared to remember something, and sat down again with a very anxious expression on his face. He and Doctor Joyce looked at one another. Before breakfast they had been closeted at a private interview. Throughout the conversation which then took place, Mr. Blyth had been very much in earnest. The doctor had begun by

being incredulous and sarcastic in a good-humoured way; but ended by speaking seriously, and making a promise under certain conditions. The time for the performance of that promise had arrived.

"You needn't wait, Vance," said the rector. "Never mind about the things. I'll ring when you're wanted."

Vance gloomily departed.

"Now the young people have left us, Mrs. Peckover," said Doctor Joyce, "there is a good opportunity for my making a proposition, on behalf of my old friend here, Mr. Blyth, who, as you have noticed, feels great sympathy for your little Mary. But, before I mention this proposal (which I am sure you will receive in the best spirit), we should all wish, if you have no objection, to hear any particulars you can give us on the subject of this poor child. Do you feel any reluctance to tell us whatever you know about her?"

"Oh! dear no, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, much amazed. "I should be ashamed of myself if I went making objections to anything you wanted to know about little Mary. But it's strange to be in a beautiful place like this, drinking wine with gentlefolks—and I'm almost afraid—"

"Not afraid, I hope, that you can't tell us what we are so anxious to know, at your ease, and in your own way?" said the rector, pleasantly. "Pray Mrs. Peckover, believe I am sincere in saying that we meet on equal terms. I have heard from Mr. Blyth of your kindness to that poor child; and I am proud to take your hand, and happy to see you here, as one who should always be an honoured guest in a clergyman's house—the doer of a charitable deed.

Mrs. Peckover's eyes began to fill. She could have worshipped Doctor Joyce.

"Mr. Blyth!" exclaimed Mrs. Joyce, before another word could be spoken—"excuse me, Mr. Blyth; but really—"

Valentine was trying to pour out a glass of sherry for Mrs. Peckover. Admiration of the doctor's speech, and anxiety to reassure the clown's wife, must have interfered with his precision of eye and hand; for half of the wine, as he held the decanter, was dropping into the glass, and the other half dribbling into a little river on the cloth. Mrs. Joyce thought of the walnut-table underneath, and felt distracted. Mrs. Peckover, delighted to be of use, forgot her company manners, pulled out her red

cotton pocket-handkerchief, and darted at the spilt sherry. But the rector was quicker with his napkin. Mrs. Peckover's cheeks turned the colour of her handkerchief, as she put it back in her pocket, and sat down again.

"Much obliged—no harm done," said Doctor Joyce. "Now, Valentine, if you don't leave off apologising, and sit down, I shall take Mrs. Peckover into my study, and hear everything she has to say, at a private interview. There! we are all comfortable and composed again, and ready to be told how little Mary and the friend who has been a mother to her first met."

"It's better than ten years ago, sir," began the clown's wife, speaking first to Doctor Joyce, "since my little Tommy was born; he being now at school and costing nothing, through a presentation, as they call it, which was given us. Some time after I had got over my confinement, I was out one afternoon with baby and Jemmy; which last is my husband. We were at Bangbury, just putting up the circus; it was a large neighbourhood, and we hoped to do good business. Jemmy and me and the baby went into the fields, and enjoyed ourselves, it being nice warm spring weather, though it was March at the time. We came back to Banbury by the road; and as we got near the town, we see a young woman sitting on the bank, and holding her baby in her arms, just as I had got my baby in mine.

"'How ill and weak she do look,' says Jemmy. Before I could say as much as 'Yes,' she stares up at us, and asks, in a wild voice, though it wasn't very loud either, if we can tell her the way to Bangbury workhouse. Having pretty sharp eyes, we both knew that a workhouse was no fit place for her. Her gown was dusty, and one of her boots was burst, and her hair was draggled all over her face, and her eyes sunk in her head; but we saw somehow that she was a lady—or, if she wasn't exactly a lady, that no workhouse was proper for her. I stooped to speak to her; but her baby was crying so she could hardly hear me. 'Is the poor thing ill?' says I. 'Starving,' says she, in such a desperate way, that it gave me a turn. 'Is that your child?' says I, a bit frightened about how she'd answer. 'Yes,' she says, in quite a new voice, soft and sorrowful, and bending her face away from me over the child. 'Then why don't you suckle it?' says I. She looks at me, and then at Jemmy, and shakes her head, and says nothing. I give my baby to Jemmy to hold, and went and sat down by her. He

walked away a little, and I whispered to her again, 'Why don't you suckle it?' and she whispered to me, 'My milk's all dried up.' I couldn't wait to hear no more till I'd got her baby at my breast.

"That was the first time I suckled little Mary. She wasn't a month old then, and oh, so weak and small! such a mite compared to mine!

"You may be sure, sir, that I asked the young woman lots of questions, while I was sitting with her. She stared at me with a dazed look, quite stupefied by weariness or grief, or both. She wouldn't say where she come from, or who her friends were, or what her name was. She said she should never have name or home or friends again. I quietly stole a look down at her left hand, and saw that there was no wedding-ring on her finger, and guessed what she meant. 'Does the father know you are wandering about in this way?' says I. She flushes up directly; 'No,' says she, 'he doesn't know where I am. He never had any love for me, and he has no pity for me now. God's curse on him wherever he goes!'—'Oh, hush! hush!' says I, 'don't talk like that!' 'Why do you ask me questions?' says she more fiercely than ever. 'What business have you to ask questions that make me mad?' 'I've only one more to bother you with,' says I, quite cool; 'haven't you got any money with you?' You see, now I'd got her child at my bosom, I didn't care for what she said, or fear for what she might do to me. The poor mite was sure to be a peacemaker between us, sooner or later.

"It turned out she'd got sixpence and a few half-pence—not a farthing more, and too proud to ask help from any of her friends. I managed to worm out of her that she had run away from home before her confinement, and had gone to some strange place to be confined, where they'd robbed her. By the time I'd found out this, her baby was quiet, and ready to go to sleep. I gave it her back. She said nothing, but took and kissed my hand, her lips feeling like burning coals. 'You're kindly welcome,' says I, a little flustered. 'Just wait while I speak to my husband.' Though she'd been and done wrong, I couldn't for the life of me help pitying her, for all her fierce ways. She was so young, and so ill, and had such a beautiful face (little Mary's is the image of it, 'specially about the eyes), and seemed so like a lady, that it was a sin, I thought, to send her to a workhouse.

"Well, I went and told Jemmy all I had got out of her—my own baby kicking and crowing in my arms again, as happy as a king. 'It seems shocking,' says I, 'to let such as her go into a workhouse. What had we better do?'—Says Jemmy, 'Let's take her to the circus and ask Peggy Burke.'

"Peggy Burke was the finest rider that ever stepped on a horse's back. We've had nothing to come near her, since she went to Astley's. She was the wildest devil of an Irish girl—oh! I humbly beg your pardon, sir, for saying such a word; but she really was so wild, I hope you'll excuse it. She'd go through fire and water, as they say, to serve people she liked; but as for them she didn't, she'd often use her riding-whip among 'em. That brute Jubber would never have beaten my little Mary, if Peggy had been with us! He was so frightened of her that she could twist him round her finger; for he durstn't quarrel with the best rider in England, and let other circuses get hold of her. Peggy was wonderful sharp, and always fond of me, and took my part; so when Jemmy said he thought it best to ask her what we had better do, I thought it best too. We took the young woman and the baby with us to the circus. She never asked any questions; she didn't seem to care where she went; she was dazed and desperate—a sight, Ma'am, to make your heart ache.

"They were just getting tea in the circus, which was nearly finished. Peggy was walking about on the grass outside, whistling (that was one of her queer ways) 'The girl I left behind me.' 'Ah! Peck,' says she, 'what have you been after? Who's the lady ye've brought to tea?' I told her, sir, all I have told you; while Jemmy set the young woman down on one of our trunks, and got her a cup of tea. 'It seems dreadful,' says I, 'to send such as her to the workhouse, don't it?' 'Workhouse!' says Peggy, firing up; 'I wish we could catch the man who's got her in that scrape, and put him in there on water-gruel for the rest of his life. I'd give a shillin' a wheal out of my own pocket for the privilege of scoring the thief's face with my whip, till his own mother wouldn't know him!' And then she went on, sir, abusing all the men in her Irish way, which I can't repeat. At last she stops. 'You're a darlin', Peck!' says she, 'and your friends are my friends. Stop where you are, and let me speak to the young woman on the trunk.'

"After a while she comes back, and says, 'I've done it, Peck! She's mighty close, and as proud as Lucifer; but she's only a

dressmaker.' 'A dressmaker!' says I; 'how did you find out she was a dressmaker?' 'Why, I looked at her forefinger,' says Peggy, 'and saw the pricks of her needle on it, and soon made her talk after that. She knows fancy work and cuttin' out—would ye have thought it. I'll show her how to give the workhouse the go-by to-morrow, if she only holds out, and keeps in her senses. Stop where you are, Peck! I'm going to make Jubber put his dirty hand into his pocket and pull out some money; and that's a sight worth stoppin' to see.'

"I waited; and she called for Jubber, just as if he'd been her servant; and he come out of the circus. 'I want ten shillings advance of wages for that lady on the trunk,' says Peggy. He laughed at her. 'Show your ugly teeth at me again,' says she, 'and I'll box your ears. I've my light hand for a horse's mouth, and my heavy hand for a man's cheek; you know that by this time! Pull out the ten shillings.' 'What for?' said he, frowning. 'Just this,' says she. 'I mean to leave your circus, unless I get those six character dresses you promised me; and the lady there can do them up. Pull out the ten shillings! for I've made up my mind to appear on Garryowen as six women at once.'

"What she meant was, that she was to have six different dresses on, one over another; and go galloping round the ring on Garryowen (which was a horse), beginning as Empress of Roossia; and then throwing off the top dress without the horse stopping, and showing next as some famous Frenchwoman, in the dress underneath; and keeping on so with different nations, till she got down to the last dress, which was to be Britannia and the Union Jack. We'd got remnants, and old dresses and things to make and alter, but hadn't anybody clever enough at cutting out, and what they call 'Costoom,' to do what Peggy wanted—Jubber being too stingy to pay regular people who understand such things. The young woman, knowing about fancy work, was just what was wanted, if she could only get well enough. 'I'll see she works the money out,' says Peggy; 'but she's dead beat to-night, and must have her rest and supper, before she begins.' Jubber wanted to give less than ten shillings; but between threatening, and saying it should buy twenty shilling's worth of work, she got the better of him. And he gave the money, sulky enough.

"'Now,' says Peggy, 'you take her away, and get her a lodging where you're staying; and I'll come to-morrow with some of the things.' But, ah me! she was never to work as much as

sixpence of that ten shillings out. She was took bad in the night, and got so much worse that we had to send for the doctor.

"As soon as he'd seen her, he takes me into the passage, and says, 'Do you know who her friends are?' 'No, sir,' say I; 'I can't get her to tell me. I only met her by accident yesterday.' 'Try and find out,' says he; 'for I'm afraid she won't live over the night. I'll come back in the evening and see if there is any change.'

"Peggy and me went into her room; but couldn't even get her to speak to us for ever so long. All at once she cries out, 'I can't see as I ought. Where's the woman who suckled my baby?' 'Here,' says I—'here; I've got hold of your hand.' 'Will you promise to take care of my baby, and not let it go into the workhouse?' says she. 'Yes, I promise,' says I; 'I do indeed, with my whole heart.' 'We'll all take care of the baby,' says Peggy; 'try and cheer up, and you'll get well enough to see me on Garryowen's back before we leave Bangbury—you will for certain if you cheer up.' 'I give my baby,' she says, clutching at my hand, 'to the woman who suckled it; and I pray God to bless her and forgive me, for Jesus Christ's sake.' After that, she lay quiet for a minute. Then she says faintly, 'Its name's to be Mary. Put it into bed again; I should like to touch its cheek, and feel how soft and warm it is once more.' And I took the baby out of its crib, and lifted it, asleep as it was, into the bed by her side, and guided her hand to its cheek. I saw her lips move a little, and bent down over her. 'Give me one kiss,' she whispered, 'before I die.' And I kissed her, and tried to stop crying as I did it. Then I says to Peggy, 'You wait while I fetch the doctor back; I'm afraid she's going.' He wasn't at home when I got to his house. I didn't know what to do, when I see a gentleman who looked like a clergyman, and I asked him if he was one; and he said 'Yes'; and went back with me. I heard a low wailing in the room, and saw Peggy sitting on the bundle of dresses she'd brought in the morning, rocking herself backwards and forwards as Irish people do when they're crying. I went to the bed, and looked through the curtains. The baby was sleeping as pretty as ever, and its mother's hand was touching one of its arms. I was just going to speak to her again, when the clergyman said 'Hush,' and took a bit of looking-glass that was on the chimney-piece, and held it

over her lips. She was gone. Her poor white hand lay dead on the baby's arm.

"I answered all the clergyman's questions, telling him everything I knew. When I'd done, Peggy starts up from the bundle and says: 'Mind, sir, whatever you do, the child's not to be took from this person, and sent to the workhouse. The mother give it to her on that very bed, and I'm a witness.' 'And I promised to be a mother to the baby, sir,' says I. He turns round to me, and says nobody shall take it away from me, unless them as can show their right comes to claim it. 'But now,' says he, 'we must think of other things. We must try and find out something about this poor woman.'

"It was easier to say that than to do." The poor thing had nothing with her but a change of linen and the child, and that gave us no clue. Then we searched her pocket. There was a handkerchief, marked 'M. G.'; and some bits of rusks to sop for the child; and the sixpence and halfpence which she had when I met her; and beneath all, in a corner, as if forgotten, a small hair bracelet. It was made of two kinds of hair—very little of one kind, and a good deal of the other. And on the clasp of the bracelet there was in tiny letters, 'In memory of S. G.' I've often and often looked at the bracelet since that time.

"We found nothing more. The clergyman said that the 'M. G.' on the handkerchief must be the initials of her name; and the 'S. G.' on the bracelet must mean, he thought, some relation whose hair she wore as a keepsake. I remember Peggy and me wondering which was S. G.'s hair; and who the other person might be, whose hair was wove into the bracelet. But the clergyman cut us short by asking for pen, ink, and paper. 'I'm going to write an advertisement,' says he, 'saying how you met with the young woman, and what she was like, and how she was dressed.' 'Do you mean to say anything about the baby, sir?' says I. 'Certainly,' says he; 'it's only right, if we get at her friends, to give them the chance of doing something for the child. And if they live in this county, I believe we shall find them; for the 'Bangbury Chronicle' goes everywhere.

"So he writes what he said, and takes it away to be printed in the next number of the newspaper. 'If nothing comes of this,' says he, 'I can manage about the burial with a charitable society here. I'll inform you the moment the advertisement's answered.' I almost hoped they wouldn't answer it. Having suckled the baby, and kissed its mother before she died, I

couldn't make up my mind to its being took away from me just then. I ought to have thought how hard it would be for us to bring the child up. But, somehow, I never did think of that—no more did Peggy—no more did Jammy; not even when we put the baby to bed that night along with our own.

“Well, sir, two days after the advertisement come out, it was answered in the cruellest letter I ever set eyes on. The clergyman he come with it. ‘It was left this evening,’ says he, ‘by a messenger, who went away directly. I told my servant to follow; but it was too late—he was out of sight.’ The letter was short, and in a woman’s handwriting—feigned, the clergyman said. There was no name, and no date. Inside it was a ten-pound note; and the person wrote that it was enclosed to bury the young woman decently. ‘She was better dead than alive’—the letter went on—‘after having disgraced her father and relations. As for the child, it was the child of sin, and had no claim on people who desired to preserve all that was left of their good name, and to set a moral example to others. The parish must support it. It would be useless to attempt to trace them, or advertise again. The baby’s father had disappeared, they didn’t know where; and they could hold no communication now with such a monster of wickedness, even if he was found. She was dead in her shame; and her name should never be mentioned among them she belonged to.

“She was buried in the poor corner of the churchyard. They marked the place, in case anybody should ever want to see it, by cutting M. G. and the date upon a board at the head of the grave. The clergyman give me the bracelet and the handkerchief, and said, ‘You keep these as careful as you keep the child; for they may be of importance one day. I shall seal up the letter (which is addressed to me) and put it in my strong box.’ He’d asked me if I’d thought of what a responsibility it was for me to provide for the baby. And I told him I’d promised, and would keep my promise, and trust to God’s providence. The clergyman was very kind, and got up a subscription for the poor babe; and Peggy Burke, when she had her benefit, give half of what she got as her subscription. I never heard nothing about the child’s friends from that time to this; and I know no more who its father is now than I did then. And glad I am that he’s never come forward—though I oughtn’t to say so. I keep the bracelet and the handkerchief, for the mother’s sake

as well as the child's. I've known sorrow with her since I took her as my own; but I love her the dearer for it, and still think the day a happy day for both, when I stopped and suckled her by the roadside."

CHAPTER V.

MADONNA'S MISFORTUNE.

As the clown's wife ended, but little was said by those who listened. They were too affected to speak, as yet, except briefly and in low voices. Mrs. Joyce raised her handkerchief to her eyes. Her husband murmured words of sympathy and thanks—in an unusually subdued manner. Valentine said nothing; but he drew his chair close to Mrs. Peckover, and turning his face away as if he did not wish it to be seen, took her hand and patted it gently. All looked out with one accord, and, as it seemed, with one feeling, towards the garden.

In a shady place among the trees, the rector's daughters, and little Mary, and the great Newfoundland dog were sitting together on the grass. The two young ladies appeared to be fastening a garland round the child's neck, while she was playfully offering a nosegay for Leo to smell. The sight was homely enough; but full of the tenderest interest—after the narrative which had just engaged them—to those who witnessed it. They looked on the garden scene silently. Mrs. Joyce was the first to speak.

"Would it be asking too much, Mrs. Peckover," said she, "to inquire how the poor thing really met with the accident that caused her misfortune? I know there is an account of it in the bills, but—"

"It's the most infamous thing I ever read!" interrupted Mr. Blyth, indignantly. "The man who wrote it ought to be put in the pillory!"

"Gently, Valentine—gently," interposed the rector. "I think, my love," he continued, turning to Mrs. Joyce, "that it is hardly considerate to Mrs. Peckover to expect her to comply. She has already sacrificed herself once to our curiosity; and to ask her now to recur a second time to recollections which must distress her—"

"It's worse than distressing, indeed, sir, even to think of that dreadful accident," said Mrs. Peckover, "and specially as I can't help taking some blame to myself. But if the lady

wishes to know how it happened, I'm agreeable to tell her. People in our way of life, ma'am are obliged to dry the tear at their eyes long before it's gone from their hearts."

"I ought to tell you first, sir, that I got on much better with little Mary than ever I thought I should for the first six years. She grew up so pretty that gentlefolks was always noticing her, and asking about her; and in every place the circus went to they made her presents, which helped. It was not till she was near her seventh birthday that I was foolish enough to consent to her being shown in the performances.

"I was sorely tried before I did consent. Jubber first said he wanted her to perform with the riders; and I said 'No' at once, though I was awful frightened of him in those days. But soon after, Jemmy (who wasn't the clown then that he is now; there was others to be got for his money, to do what he did at that time)—Jemmy comes to me, saying he's afraid he shall lose his place, if I don't give in. This staggered me; for I don't know what we should have done if my husband had lost his engagement. And there was the poor dear child herself, mad to be carried up in the air on horseback, always begging and praying to be made a rider of. And all of 'em in the circus worried and laughed at me; and, in short, I give in at last.

"I made a bargain, though, that she should only be trusted to the steadiest man, and the best rider of the lot. They called him 'Muley,' and stained his face to make him look like a Turk, but his real name was Yapp, and a very good sort of man he was in his way, having a family of his own to look after. He used to ride splendid, with three horses under him—one foot on the made it out that he was to act a wild man, flying for his life, outer horse's back, and one foot on the inner. Him and Jubber with his child, and poor little Mary was to be the child. They darkened her face like his; and put an outlandish kind of white dress on her; and buckled a belt round her waist, with a handle in it for Yapp to hold her by. After first making believe in all sorts of ways, that him and the child was in danger of being shot, he had to make believe afterwards that they had escaped; and to hold her up, in triumph, at the full stretch of his arm—galloping round the ring all the while. He was a tremendous strong man, and could do it easy.

"Poor little love! she soon got over the first fright, and had a sort of mad fondness for it that I never liked, for it wasn't natural. Yapp, he said, she'd got the heart of a lion, and would

grow up the finest woman-rider in the world. I was very unhappy about it, always fearing some accident. But for some time nothing happened; and lots of money come into the circus to see Yapp and little Mary—but that was Jubber's luck and not ours. One night—when she was a little better than seven—

“Oh, ma'am, how I lived over that dreadful night I don't know! The strap—no, I mean the handle; the handle in the strap gave way all of a sudden—just at the last! just at the worst time, when he couldn't catch her—!

“Never—oh, never, to my dying day, shall I forget the screech that went up from the audience; and the sight of the white thing huddled dead-still on the boards! We hadn't such a number in as usual that night; and she fell between the benches. I got knocked down by the horses in running to her—I was out of my senses, and didn't know where I was going. Yapp had fallen among them, and hurt himself, trying to catch her—they were running wild in the ring—the horses was—frantic-like with the noise. I got up somehow, and a crowd jostled me, and I saw my darling carried among them. I felt hands on me, trying to pull me back, but I broke away, and got into the waiting-room with the rest.

“There she was—my little Mary, that I'd promised to take care of—there she was, lying white and still on an old box. And people crowding round her. And a doctor feeling her head all over. And Yapp among them, held up by two men, his face all over blood. I wasn't able to speak; I didn't feel as if I was breathing, till the doctor stopped, and looked up; and then a great shudder went through all of us.

“‘It's not killed her,’ says the doctor. ‘Her brain's escaped injury.’

“I didn't hear another word.

“I don't know how long it was before I seemed to wake up, with dreadful pain and tearing of everything inside me. I was on the landlady's bed, and Jemmy was standing over me with a bottle of salts. ‘They've put her to bed,’ he says, ‘and the doctor's setting her arm.’ I didn't recollect at first; but when I did, it was almost as bad as seeing the accident over again.

“It was some time before any of us found out what had really happened. The breaking of her arm had saved her head; which was only cut and bruised a little, not as bad as was feared. Day after day, and night after night, I sat by her, comforting her through her fever, and the pain of the splints on

her arm, and never suspecting the awful misfortune that had really happened. She was always quiet and silent for a child, poor lamb, in little illnesses that she'd had; and somehow, I didn't wonder—at least, at first—why she never said a word, and never answered me when I spoke.

"This went on, though, after she got better, and a strange look came over her eyes. They seemed to be always wondering and frightened about something. She took to rolling her head about restlessly from one side of the pillow to the other; making a sort of muttering and humming now and then, but never seeming to notice or care for anything I said. One day I was warming a cup of beef-tea, when I heard, quite sudden and plain, these words from where she lay, 'Why are you always so quiet? Why doesn't somebody speak?'

"I knew there wasn't another soul in the room but the poor child at that time; and yet, the voice as spoke was no more like little Mary's voice than my voice, sir, is like yours. It sounded, somehow, hoarse and low, and deep and faint, all at the same time; the shockingest voice to come from a child, who always used to speak so clearly and prettily before. It gave me such a turn to hear her, that I upset the beef-tea, and ran back in a fright to the bed. 'Why, Mary! Mary!' says I, quite loud, 'are you so well already that you're trying to imitate Mr. Jubber's voice?'

"There was the same wondering look in her eyes—only wilder than I had ever seen it—while I was speaking. When I'd done, she says, in the same strange way, 'Speak out, mother; I can't hear you when you whisper like that.' She was as long saying these words, and bungled over them as much, as if she was only just learning to speak. I got the first suspicion then, of what had happened. 'Mary!' I bawled out as loud as I could, 'can't you hear me?' She shook her head and stared at me with the frightened, bewildered look again; then seemed to get pettish and impatient all of a sudden—the first time I ever saw her so—and hid her face on the pillow.

"Just then the doctor came in. 'Oh, sir!' says I, whispering—just as if I hadn't found out a minute ago that she couldn't hear me at the top of my voice—'I'm afraid there's something wrong with her hearing—.' 'Have you only just now suspected that?' says he; 'I've been afraid of it for some days, but I thought it best to say nothing till I'd tried her; and she's hardly well enough yet to be worried with experiments on her

ears.' 'She's much better,' says I; 'she's much better to-day, sir! Oh, do try her now, for it's so dreadful to be in doubt.'

"He went up to the bedside, and I followed. She was lying with her face hidden on the pillow, just as when I left her. The doctor says to me, 'Don't disturb her, don't let her look round, so that she can see us—I'm going to call to her.' And he called 'Mary' out loud, twice; and she never moved. The third time he tried her, it was with such a shout at the top of his voice, that the landlady come up, thinking something had happened. I was looking over his shoulder, and saw that my dear child never started in the least. 'Poor thing,' says the doctor, quite sorrowful, 'this is worse than I expected.' He stooped and touched her, as he said this; and she turned round directly, and put out her hand to have her pulse felt. I tried to get out of her sight, for I was crying, and didn't wish her to see it; but she was too sharp. She looked hard in my face and the landlady's, then in the doctor's, which was downcast enough; for he had got very fond of her, as everybody else did who saw little Mary.

"'What's the matter?' she says, in the same strange unnatural voice again. We tried to pacify her, but only made her worse. 'Why do you keep on whispering?' she asks. 'Why don't you speak out loud, so that I can—,' and then she stopped, in a sort of bewilderment. She tried to get up in bed, and her face turned red all over. 'Can she read?' says the doctor. 'Oh, yes, sir,' says I; 'my husband taught her.' 'Get me paper and pen and ink directly,' says he to the landlady; who at once got him what he wanted. 'We must quiet her,' says the doctor, 'or she'll excite herself into another attack of fever. She feels what's the matter with her, but don't understand it; and I'm going to tell her. It's a risk,' he says, writing on the paper in large letters, *You Are Deaf*; 'but I must try all I can for her ears immediately; and this will prepare her,' says he, going to the bed, and holding the paper before her.

"She shrank back on the pillow, as still as death, the instant she saw it; but didn't cry, and looked more puzzled and astonished than distressed. But she was breathing 'dreadful quick—I felt that, as I stooped and kissed her. 'She's too young,' says the doctor, 'to know the extent of her calamity. Stop here and keep her quiet till I come back, for I trust the case is not hopeless.' 'But what has made her deaf, sir?' says the landlady, opening the door for him. 'The shock of that

fall,' says he, going out in a hurry. I thought I should never have held up my head again, as I heard them words.

"Well, the doctor come back; and syringed her ears first—and that did no good. Then he tried blistering, and then he put on leeches; and still it was no use. 'I'm afraid it is hopeless,' says he; 'but there's a doctor who's had more practice than I've had with deaf people, who comes from where he lives to our Dispensary once a week. To-morrow's his day, and I'll bring him.

"And he did bring this gentleman, as he promised—an old gentleman, with such a pleasant way of speaking that I understood everything he said directly. 'I'm afraid you must make up your mind to the worst,' says he. 'I have been hearing about the child, and I'm sorry to say I don't think there's much hope.' Then he goes to the bed and looks at her. 'Ah,' says he, 'there's the same expression in her face that I remember in a mason's boy—a patient of mine—who fell off a ladder, and lost his hearing by the shock. You don't hear what I'm saying, do you, my dear?' says he. 'You don't hear me saying that you're the prettiest little girl I ever saw?' She looked up at him confused, and silent. He didn't speak to her again, but told me to turn her on the bed, so that he could get at one of her ears.

"He pulled out some instruments, while I did what he asked, and put them into her ear. Then he looked in, through a sort of spy-glass thing. Then he did it with the other ear; and then he laid down his instruments and pulled out his watch. 'Write on a piece of paper,' says he to the other doctor 'Do you know that the watch is ticking?' When this was done, he makes signs to Mary to open her mouth, and puts as much of his watch in as would go between her teeth, while the other doctor holds up the paper. When he took the watch out again, she shook her head, and said 'No,' in the same strange voice. The old gentleman didn't speak as he put the watch back in his fob; but I saw by his face that he thought it was all over with her hearing.

"'Oh, do something for her, sir!' says I. 'For God's sake, don't give her up, sir!' 'My good soul,' says he, 'you must set her an example of cheerfulness, and keep up her spirits—that's all that can be done.' 'Not all, sir,' says I, 'surely not all!' 'Indeed it is,' says he; 'her hearing is completely gone; the experiment with my watch proves it. I had an exactly

similar case with the mason's boy,' he says, to the other doctor. 'The shock of that fall has paralysed the auditory nerve.' I remember those words exactly, sir, though I didn't understand them at the time. But he explained himself to me; telling me over again, in a plain way, what he'd just told the doctor. 'I hope,' says he, 'the poor child is too young to suffer much mental misery under her misfortune. Keep her amused, and keep her talking, if you can—though I doubt whether, in a little time, you won't fail in getting her to speak at all.'

"'Don't say that, sir,' says I; 'don't say she'll be dumb as well as deaf; it's enough to break one's heart to think of it.' 'But I must say so, for I'm afraid it's the truth.' And then he asks whether I hadn't noticed already that she was unwilling to speak; and that, when she did speak, her voice wasn't the same voice it used to be. I said 'Yes,' and asked him whether the fall had had to do with it. He said, taking me up very short, it had everything to do with it, because the fall had made her, what they call, stone deaf, which prevented her from hearing her own voice. So it was changed, he told me, because she had no ear now to guide herself by in speaking, and couldn't know whether the words she said were spoken soft or loud, or deep or clear. 'So far as the child herself is concerned,' says he, 'she might as well be without a voice at all; for she has nothing but her memory left to tell her she has one.'

"I burst out a-crying as he said this; for I'd never thought of anything so dreadful before. 'I've been a little too sudden in telling you, haven't I?' says the old gentleman, kindly; 'but you must be taught how to meet the full extent of this misfortune for the sake of the child, whose future comfort depends on you.' And then he bid me keep up her reading and writing, and force her to use her voice as much as I could. He told me I should find her grow more unwilling to speak every day, for the reason that she couldn't hear a single word she said, or a single tone of her own voice. He warned me that she was already losing the wish to speak; and that it would soon be little short of pain to her to be made to say even a few words; but he begged me not to let good nature get the better of prudence, and not to humour her, however I might feel tempted—for if I did, she would be dumb as well as deaf. So, once again,' says he, 'mind you make her use her voice. Don't give her her dinner, unless she asks for it. Treat her severely in that way, poor little soul, it's for her own good.'

"It was all very well for him to say that, but it was impossible for me to do it. The dear child seemed to get used to her misfortune, except when we tried to make her speak. It was the saddest sight in the world to see how patiently she bore with her hard lot from the first. As she grew better in health, she kept up her reading and writing quite cleverly; and her natural cheerful ways come back the same as ever. I've read or heard somewhere about God tempering the wind to the shorn lamb. I don't know who said that first; but it might have been spoken of my darling little Mary in those days. Instead of us being the first to comfort her, it was she that was first to comfort us. And so she's gone on ever since—bless her heart! Only treat her kindly, and she's the merriest, happiest little thing—the easiest pleased and amused that ever lived.

"If we were wrong in not forcing her to speak more than we did, I must say this much for me and my husband, that we hadn't the heart to make her miserable and keep on tormenting her, when she was always happy and comfortable if we only let her alone. We tried for some time to do what the gentleman told us; but it's so hard—as you've found, I dare say, ma'am—not to humour them you love! I never see the tear in her eye, except when we forced her to speak, and then she always cried, and was fretful and out of sorts the whole day. It seemed such dreadful difficulty and pain to her to say only two or three words; and the husky, moaning voice that sounded somehow as if it didn't belong to her, never changed. My husband first gave up worrying her. He practised her with her book and writing, but let her have her own will in everything else; and he taught her all sorts of tricks on the cards, which was a good way of keeping her going with her reading and her pen pleasantly, by reason of him and her being obliged to put down everything they had to say to each other on a little slate that we bought for her.

"I held out in making her speak some time after my husband; but at last I gave in too. I know it was wrong and selfish, but I got a fear that she wouldn't like me as well as she used to do, and would take more to Jemmy than to me, if I went on. Oh, how happy she was the first day I wrote on her slate that I wouldn't worry her about speaking any more! She jumped up on my knees, and kissed me over and over again. For the rest of the day she run about the room, and all over the house, like a mad thing, and when Jemmy came home at night, she would

get out of bed and romp with him, and ride pickaback, and try and imitate the funny faces she'd seen him make in the ring. I believe that was the first happy night we had all had together since the accident.

"Long after, my conscience was uneasy, at times, about giving in as I had. At last I got a chance of speaking to another doctor; and he told me that if we had kept her up in her speaking ever so severely, it would still have been pain and difficulty to her to say her words, to her dying day. He said, too, that he felt sure—though he couldn't explain it to me—that people afflicted with such stone deafness as hers didn't feel the loss of speech, because they never had the want to use their speech; and that they took to making signs, and writing, quite kindly as a sort of second nature. This comforted me a good deal. I hope in God what the gentleman said was true; for if I was in fault in letting her have her own way and be happy, it's past mending. For more than two years I've never heard her say a word, no more than if she'd been born dumb, and all the doctors in the world couldn't make her speak now.

"Perhaps, sir, you might wish to know how she first come to show her tricks on the cards in the circus. There was no danger in that, and yet I'd have given almost everything not to let her be shown as she is. But I was threatened again, in the wickedest way—I hardly know how to tell it—Jubber, you must know—"

Just as Mrs. Peckover, with painful hesitation, pronounced the last words, the hall clock struck two. She heard it, and stopped.

"Oh, if you please, sir, was that two o'clock?" she asked, starting up.

"Yes, Mrs. Peckover," said the rector; "but really, after having been indebted to you for so much that has deeply interested us, we can't think of letting you and little Mary leave yet."

"Indeed we must, sir; and many thanks to you for wanting to keep us longer," said Mrs. Peckover. "What I was going to say isn't much; it's as well you shouldn't hear it—and indeed, indeed, ma'am, we must go. I told this gentleman, Mr. Blyth, when I come in, that I'd stolen to you under pretence of taking Mary for a walk. If we are not back to two o'clock dinner in the circus, it's unknown what Jubber may not do. This gentle-

man will tell you how he treated the poor child last night—we must go, sir, for her sake; or else—”

“Stop!” cried Valentine, his suppressed excitability bursting bounds, as he took Mrs. Peckover by the arm, and pressed her back into her chair. “Stop!—hear me. Don’t interrupt me, Mrs. Peckover; and don’t get up. You must never take that little angel of a child near Jubber again—never! If I thought he was likely to touch her any more, I should go mad, and murder him!—Let me alone, doctor! I beg Mrs. Joyce’s pardon for behaving like this. Be quiet, all of you! I must take the child home with me—oh, Mrs. Peckover, don’t, don’t say no! I’ll make her as happy as the day is long. I’ve no child; I’ll watch over her, and love her, and teach her all my life. I’ve got a suffering, bed-ridden wife at home, who would think such a companion as little Mary the greatest blessing God could send. Oh, doctor, doctor! think how kind Lavvie would be to that afflicted child; and try if you can’t make Mrs. Peckover consent. I can’t speak any more—I know I’m wrong to burst out in this way; and I beg all your pardons, I do indeed! Speak to her, doctor—pray speak to her, if you don’t want to make me miserable for the rest of my life!”

With those words, Valentine darted into the garden, and made straight for the spot where the little girls were sitting among the trees.

CHAPTER VI.

MADONNA GOES TO LONDON.

The clown’s wife had sat very pale and quiet under the overwhelming torrent of Mr. Blyth’s exclamations, and entreaties. She seemed quite unable to speak, after he was gone; and looked round in a bewildered manner at the rector, with fear as well as amazement.

“Compose yourself, Mrs. Peckover,” said Doctor Joyce, “and kindly give me your best attention. Let me beg you to excuse Mr. Blyth’s odd behaviour, which I see has startled you. But, however wildly he may talk, he means honourably and truthfully. You will understand this better if you will let me explain the proposal, which he has just made so abruptly and confusedly.”

“Proposal, sir!” exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, faintly, looking

more frightened than ever—"Proposal! Oh, sir! you don't mean you're going to ask me to part from little Mary?"

"I will ask you to do nothing that your own good sense may not approve," answered the rector. "In plain terms, my friend, Mr. Blyth, feels such admiration for your little Mary, and such a desire to help her in her misfortune, that he is willing and eager to make her future prospects his own peculiar care, by adopting her as his daughter. This offer, though coming from a stranger, can hardly astonish you, I think, if you reflect on the strong claims which the child has to compassion and kindness. Other strangers, as you have told us, have shown deep interest in her on many occasions. It is not, therefore, wonderful that a gentleman, whose integrity I have had opportunities of testing during a friendship of twenty years, should prove the sincerity of his sympathy for the poor child, by such a proposal."

"Don't ask me to say yes, sir!" pleaded Mrs. Peckover, with tears in her eyes. "Don't ask me to do that! Anything else to prove my gratitude for your kindness; but how can I part from my little Mary? You can't have the heart to ask me!"

"I have the heart, Mrs. Peckover, to feel deeply for your distress at the idea of parting from the child; but, for her sake, I again ask you to control your feelings. And, more than that, I appeal to you by your love to her, to grant a fair hearing to the petition which I now make on Mr. Blyth's behalf."

"I would, if I could, sir,—but it's because I love her so, that I can't! Besides, as you said, he's a perfect stranger."

"I admit the force of that objection, Mrs. Peckover; but let me remind you, that I vouch for the uprightness of his character, and his fitness to be trusted with the child, after twenty years' experience of him. You may answer that I am a stranger, too; and I can only ask you, in return, to accept my character and position as the best proofs I can offer that I am not unworthy of confidence. If you placed little Mary for instruction (as you well might) in an asylum for the deaf and dumb, you would be obliged to put trust in the authorities of that asylum, on much the same grounds as those I now advance to justify you in putting trust in me."

"Oh, sir! don't think—pray don't think I am unwilling to trust you—so kind as you have been—and a clergyman too—I should be ashamed of myself, if I could doubt—"

"Let me tell you, plainly, what advantages to the child Mr.

Blyth's proposal holds out. He has no family of his own, and his wife is, as he hinted, an invalid for life. If you could only see the sweet patience with which she bears her affliction, you would acknowledge that little Mary could appeal for an affectionate welcome to no kinder heart. The only danger I fear for the child in my friend's house, is, that she would be spoilt by indulgence. Though by no means rich, Mr. Blyth is independent, and can offer her all the comforts of life."

"Don't say any more, sir! Don't break my heart by making me part with her!"

"You will live, Mrs. Peckover, to thank me for trying your fortitude as I try it now. Hear me a little longer, while I tell you what Mr. Blyth proposes. He is anxious—if you give the child into his charge—that you should have access to her whenever you like. He will leave his address in London with you. He desires, from motives honourable to you and to himself, to defray your travelling expenses whenever you wish to see the child. He will always acknowledge your prior right to her affection. He will offer her every facility for constantly corresponding with you; and if the life she leads in his house be, in the slightest respect, distasteful to her, he pledges himself to give her up to you again—if you and she desire it—at any sacrifice of his own feelings. These are the terms he proposes, and I can most solemnly assure you that he will hold sacred the strict performance of each of these conditions, as I have stated them."

"I ought to let her go, sir—I know I ought—but how can I, after all the time she's been like my own child? Oh, ma'am, say a word for me! I seem so selfish—say a word for me!"

"Will you let me say a word for little Mary, instead?" rejoined Mrs. Joyce. "Mr. Blyth's proposal offers her a secure protection against that inhuman wretch who has ill-used her, and may ill-use her again, in spite of everything you can do. Think of that Mrs. Peckover—pray do!"

"I know it's all true; I know I'm an ungrateful, selfish wretch—but give me a little time to think; a little time longer to be with the poor darling I love like my own child!"

Doctor Joyce was just drawing his chair closer to Mrs. Peckover before he answered, when the door opened, and Vance softly entered.

"What do you want?" said the rector, a little irritably, "Didn't I tell you not to come in again till I rang?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," answered Vance, casting rather a malicious look at the clown's wife as he closed the door, "but there's a person waiting in the hall, who says he comes on important business, and must see you."

"Who is he? What's his name?"

"He says his name is Jubber, sir."

Mrs. Peckover started from her chair with a scream. "Don't—pray, for mercy's sake, sir, don't let him into the garden where Mary is!" she gasped, clutching Doctor Joyce by the arm in terror. "He's found us out, and come here in one of his passions! He cares for nothing and nobody, sir; he's bad enough to ill-treat her even before you. What am I to do? Oh, what am I to do?"

"Leave everything to me," said the rector, kindly. Then, turning to Vance, he added:—"Show Mr. Jubber into the cloak-room, and say I will be with him directly."

"Now, Mrs. Peckover," continued Doctor Joyce, in the most composed manner, "before I see this man I have three questions to ask. In the first place, were you a witness, last night, of his ill-usage of that poor child? (Mr. Blyth told me of it.) The fellow beat her, did he not?"

"Oh, indeed he did, sir!—beat her most cruelly."

"And you saw it yourself?"

"I did, sir. He'd have used her worse if I hadn't been by to prevent him."

"Very well. Now tell me if you or your husband have signed any agreement—papers, I mean, giving this man a right to claim the child as one of his performers?"

"Me sign an agreement, sir! I never did such a thing in my life. Jubber would think himself insulted, if you talked of his signing an agreement with such as me or Jemmy."

"Now, my third question refers to little Mary herself. I will undertake to put it out of this blackguard's power to lay a finger on her again—but I can only do so on one condition, which it rests with you to grant."

"I'll do anything to save her, sir."

"The condition is that you consent to Mr. Blyth's proposal; for I can only ensure the child's safety on those terms."

"Then, sir, I consent," said Mrs. Peckover, speaking with a sudden firmness, which startled Mrs. Joyce, who stood by listening anxiously. "I consent; for I should be the vilest wretch in the world, if I could say 'no' at such a time. I will trust my

precious darling to you, sir, and to Mr. Blyth; from this moment. God bless her, and comfort me! for I want comfort badly. Oh, Mary! Mary! my own little Mary! to think of you and me being parted!"

The poor woman turned towards the garden as she pronounced these words; all her fortitude forsook her; and she sank back in her chair, sobbing bitterly.

Though Mr. Jubber presented the most scoundrelly aspect that humanity can assume, when clothed in his evening uniform, and illuminated by his own circus lamplight, he reached an infinitely loftier climax of blackguard perfection when arrayed in private costume, and submitted to the tremendous ordeal of pure daylight. The most monstrous ape that could be picked from the cages of the Zoological Gardens would have gained by comparison with him as he now appeared, standing in the Rectory cloak-room, with his debauched bloodshot eyes staring grimly contemptuous about him, with his yellow flabby throat exposed by a turn-down collar and a light blue neck-tie, with rouge still smeared over his gross unhealthy cheeks, with his mangy shirt-front bespattered with bad embroidery and false jewellery that had not even the decency to keep itself clean. He had his hat on, and was sulkily running his dirty fingers through the greasy black ringlets that flowed over his coat-collar, when Doctor Joyce entered.

"You wished to speak to me?" said the rector, not sitting down himself, and not asking Mr. Jubber to sit down.

"Oh! you're Doctor Joyce?" said the fellow, assuming his most insolent familiarity of manner.

"That is my name," said Dr. Joyce. "Have the goodness to state your business with me in the fewest possible words?"

"Hullo! You take that tone, do you?" said Jubber, setting his arms akimbo, and tapping his foot fiercely on the floor; "you're trying to come Tommy Grand over me, are you? Very good! I'm the man to give you change in your own coin—so here goes! What do you mean by enticing away my Mysterious Foundling?"

"You had better proceed a little," said the rector, quietly. "Thus far I understand nothing whatever, except that you wish to behave offensively; which, in a person of your appearance, is, I assure you, of not the slightest consequence. Save time by stating what you have to say in plain words."

"You want plain words—eh?" cried Jubber, losing his

temper. "Then, by God, you shall have them, and plain enough!"

"Stop," said Doctor Joyce. "If you use oaths in my presence again, I shall ring for my servant to show you out."

There was a pause, and the blackguard and the gentleman looked one another in the face. It was the old struggle, between quiet firmness of good breeding, and the savage obstinacy of bad; and ended in the old way. The blackguard flinched first.

"If your servant lays a finger on me, I'll thrash him within an inch of his life," said Jubber, looking towards the door, and scowling. "But that's not the point, just now—the point is, that I charge you with getting my deaf and dumb girl into your house, to perform on the sly. If you're too virtuous to come to my circus—and better than you have been there—you ought to have paid the proper price for a private performance. What do you mean by treating a public servant, like me, with your infernal aristocratic looks, as if I was dirt under your feet, after such shabby doings as you've been guilty of—eh?"

"May I ask how you know that the child you refer to has been at my house to-day?" asked Doctor Joyce, without taking the slightest notice of Mr. Jubber's indignation.

"One of my people saw that hypocrite of a Peckover taking her in, and told me of it when I missed them at dinner. That's good evidence, I think! Deny it if you can."

"I have no intention of denying it. The child is in my house."

"And has gone through all her performances, of course? Ah! shabby, shabby! I should be ashamed of myself, if I'd tried to do a man out of his rights like that."

"I am rejoiced to hear that you are capable under any circumstances, of being ashamed of yourself," rejoined the rector. "The child, however, has gone through no performances, not having been sent for with any such purpose. But, as you said, that's not the point. Pray, why did you speak of the little girl as your child?"

"Because she's one of my performers. But, come! I've had enough of this; I can't stop here all day; I want the child—so just deliver her up at once, will you?—and turn out Peck as soon as you like. I'll cure them both of doing this sort of thing again! I'll show them—"

"You would be employing your time much more usefully,"

said Doctor Joyce, "if you occupied it in altering the bills of your performance, so as to inform the public that the deaf and dumb child will not appear before them again."

"Not appear again?—not appear in my circus? Why, hang me! if I don't think you're trying to be funny! Alter my bills—eh? Not bad! Upon my soul, not bad for a parson! Give us another joke, sir; I'm all attention." And Mr. Jubber put his hand to his ear, grinning in a fury of sarcasm.

"I am in earnest," said the rector. "A friend has adopted the child, and will take her home with him to-morrow. Mrs. Peckover (the only person who has any right to her) has consented. If your business here was to take the child back to your circus, it is right to inform you that she will not leave my house till she goes to London to-morrow."

"And you think I'm the man to stand this?—and give up the child?—and alter the bills?—and lose money?—and be as mild as mother's milk all the time? Oh! of course! I'm so devilish fond of you and your friend! You're such nice men, you can make me do anything! Damn this jabber and nonsense!" roared the ruffian, passing from insolence to fury, and striking his fist on the table. "Give me the child at once! I won't leave the house till I've got her!"

Doctor Joyce rang the bell. "I told you what I should do, if you used oaths in my presence again," said the rector.

"And I told you I'd kill the servant, if he laid a finger on me," said Jubber, tucking up his cuffs.

Vance appeared at the door, much less pompous than usual, and displaying an interesting paleness of complexion. Jubber spat into the palm of each of his hands, and clenched his fists.

"Have you done dinner downstairs?" asked Doctor Joyce, reddening a little, but still very quiet.

"Yes, sir," answered Vance, in a conciliating voice.

"Tell James to go to the constable, and say I want him; and let the gardener wait with you outside there in the hall."

"Now," said the rector, shutting the door again, and placing himself once more face to face with Mr. Jubber. "Now I have a last word to say, which I recommend you to hear quietly. You have no right over the child whatever; you are without a signed agreement promising you her services. (You had better hear me out.) You have no right to control the child in any manner. She is perfectly free, so far as you are concerned.—

Yes! yes! you deny it, of course! If you attempt to back that denial by still asserting your claim, and making a disturbance in my house, as sure as you stand there, I'll ruin you in Rubbleford and all the country round. (It's no use laughing—I can do it!) You beat the child last night. I am a magistrate; and I have my prosecutor and my witness ready whenever I choose to call them. I can fine or imprison you, which I please. You know the public; you know what they think of people who ill-use helpless children. If you appeared in that character before me, the Rubbleford paper would report it; and, so far as the interests of your circus are concerned, you would be ruined in this part of the country—you know it! Now I will spare you this—not from tenderness towards you—on condition that you take yourself off quietly, and never let us hear from you again. I strongly advise you to go at once; for if you wait till the constable comes, I will not answer for it that my sense of duty may not force me into giving you into custody.” With which words Doctor Joyce threw open the door, and pointed to the hall.

“Magistrate or parson,” he cried, snapping his fingers, “I don't care a damn for you. Keep the child at your peril! I'll go to the first lawyer in Rubbleford, and bring an action against you. I'll show you legal law! You ruin me indeed! I only thrashed the little toad, the deaf idiot, because she deserved it. I'll have the child back wherever you take her. I'll show you legal law! (Here he stepped to the hall door.) I'll be even with you, damme! I'll charge you with setting your menial servants to assault me. (Here he looked fiercely at the gardener, a freckled Scotch giant of six feet three, and instantly descended five steps.) Lay a finger on me, if you dare! I'm going straight from this house to the lawyer's. I'm a free Englishman, and I'll have my rights and legal law! I'll bring my action! I'll ruin you! I'll strip your gown off your back! I'll stop your mouth in your own pulpit!” Here he strutted into the front garden; his words grew indistinct, and his gross voice became gradually less and less audible. The coachman at the gate saw the last of him, and reported that he made his exit striking viciously at the flowers with his cane, and swearing that he would ruin the rector with “legal law.”

After leaving certain directions, in the improbable event of Mr. Jubber's return, Doctor Joyce repaired to his dining-room. No one was there, so he went into the garden.

Here he found the family and visitors all assembled; but a great change had passed over the party during his absence. Mr. Blyth, being informed of the result of the rector's conversation with Mrs. Peckover, acted with usual impetuosity and want of discretion; writing down delightedly on little Mary's slate, without the slightest previous preparation, that she was to go home with him to-morrow. The result of this was that the child became frightened, and ran from everybody to take refuge with Mrs. Peckover. She was still crying, and holding tight by the good woman's gown; and Valentine was loudly declaring to everybody that he loved her all the better for showing such affection to her earliest friend, when the rector joined the party.

Doctor Joyce spoke but briefly of his interview with Jubber, concealing much that had passed, and making light of the threats the fellow had uttered. Mrs. Peckover, whose self-possession seemed in imminent danger, listened anxiously to every word; and, as soon as he had done, said that she must go back to the circus directly, and tell her husband all that had occurred, as a necessary set-off against the slanders sure to be spoken against her by Mr. Jubber.

"Oh, never mind me, ma'am!" she said, in answer to the apprehensions expressed by Mrs. Joyce about her reception when she got to the circus. "The child's safe; that's all I care about. I'm strong enough to take my own part; and Jemmy, he's always by to help me. May I come back this evening; and say—and say?"

She would have added, "and say good-bye"; but thoughts which gathered round that word, made it too hard to utter. She stooped down to the child; and, kissing her, wrote on the slate, "I shall be back at seven"—then disengaged the little hands that still held her gown, and hurried from the garden, without once venturing to look behind her.

All tried their best to console little Mary; and all failed. She resolutely, though gently, resisted them; walking away into corners by herself, and looking constantly at her slate, as if she could only find comfort in reading the words which Mrs. Peckover had written. At last, Mr. Blyth took her on his knee. She struggled to get away, for a moment—then looked intently in his face; and, sighing mournfully, laid her head on his shoulder. There was a world of promise for the future success of Valentine's project in that simple action, and in the preference it showed.

The day wore on—evening came—seven struck—then half-past—then eight—and Mrs. Peckover never appeared. Doctor Joyce grew uneasy, and sent Vance to get news of her.

It was again Mr. Blyth who succeeded in partially quieting little Mary under the disappointment of not seeing Mrs. Peckover at the appointed time. The child, restless at first, had wanted to go to the circus. Finding that they detained her, she wept—wept so long, that at last she cried herself asleep in Valentine's arms. He sat supporting her with a patience that nothing could tire. The sunset rays vanished from the horizon; the quiet lustre of twilight overspread the sky—and still he refused to let her be taken from him; and said he would sit as he was all night rather than let her be disturbed.

Vance came back, and brought word that Mrs. Peckover would follow in half an hour. They had given her some work at the circus, which she was obliged to finish before she could return.

Vance next produced a handbill, which he said was being circulated all over Rubbleford; and which proved to be the composition of Mr. Jubber. That ingenious ruffian, having discovered that "legal law" was powerless to help him, and that it would be wise to keep clear of Doctor Joyce in the rector's magisterial capacity, was now artfully attempting to turn the loss of the child to his own profit, by prompt lying in his favourite large type, sprinkled with red letters. He informed the public, through the medium of hand-bills, that the father of the Mysterious Foundling had been "providentially" discovered, and that he (Mr. Jubber) had given the child up immediately, without a thought of what he might suffer, in pocket as well as in mind, by his generosity. After this, he appealed confidently to the sympathy of people of every degree, and of "fond parents" especially, to compensate him by flocking in crowds to the circus; adding, that if stimulus were wanting to urge the public into "rallying round the Ring," he was prepared to administer it, in the shape of the smallest dwarf in the world, for whose services he was in treaty, and whose appearance would take place in a few days.

Mrs. Joyce at last succeeded in persuading Mr. Blyth that he might carry little Mary upstairs to bed, without danger of awakening her. The moonbeams were streaming through the windows over the old-fashioned landings of the staircase, and bathed the child's sleeping face in lovely light, as Valentine

carefully bore her to her bedroom. "Oh! if poor Lavvie could see little Mary now."

They laid her, still asleep, on the bed, and covered her with a shawl—then went downstairs to wait for Mrs. Peckover.

The clown's wife came. They saw sorrow in her face, as they looked at her. Besides a bundle with the child's few clothes, she brought the hair bracelet and the pocket-handkerchief which had been found on little Mary's mother.

"Wherever the child goes," she said, "these must go with her." She addressed Mr. Blyth as she spoke, and gave the bracelet and the handkerchief into his hands.

It seemed a relief to Mrs. Peckover to hear that the child was asleep. All pain of parting would be spared, on one side at least. She went up to look at her, and kissed her—but so lightly that little Mary's sleep was undisturbed.

"Tell her to write to me," said poor Mrs. Peckover, through her gathering tears. "I shall prize my first letter so much, if it's only a couple of lines. God bless you, sir; good-bye. It ought to comfort me to know that you will be kind to her—I hope I shall get up to London some day, and see her. But don't forget the letter, sir; I shan't fret so much when I've got that!"

She went away, sadly murmuring these words many times, while Valentine was trying to cheer her, as they walked to the outer gate. Valentine entreated her, over and over again, to remember the terms of their agreement, and to come and judge for herself of the child's happiness in her new home. She only answered "Don't forget the letter, sir!" And so they parted.

CHAPTER VII.

MADONNA IN HER NEW HOME.

Mr. Blyth's first proceeding, after he had brought the little girl home, was to take her to the most eminent aural surgeon of the day. He did this, not in the hope of any curative result following, but as a duty he owed to her, now that she was under his charge. The surgeon was deeply interested in the case; but, after giving it careful attention, he declared it hopeless. Her sense of hearing, he said, was gone; but her faculty of speech, although totally disused (as Mrs. Peckover had stated) for more

than two years might, he thought, be imperfectly regained, at some future time, if a tedious and uncertain process of education were resorted to, under the direction of an experienced teacher of the deaf and dumb. The child, however, had such a horror of this, when it was communicated to her, that Mr. Blyth followed Mrs. Peckover's example, and consulted the little creature's feelings by allowing her to remain happy and contented in her own way.

The first influence which reconciled her to her new life, was the influence of Mrs. Blyth. The gentleness and patience with which the painter's wife bore her incurable malady, seemed to impress the child in a remarkable manner. The sight of that frail, wasted life, which they told her had been shut up so long in the same room, and had been condemned to the same weary inaction for so many years, struck to Mary's heart. Nor did these first impressions ever alter. When years had passed, and when Mary, being "little" Mary no longer, possessed those characteristics of feature and expression which gained her the name of "Madonna," she still preserved her child's feeling for the painter's wife. However playful her manner might be with Valentine, it invariably changed when she was in Mrs. Blyth's presence; always displaying the same anxious tenderness, the same artless admiration, and the same loving sympathy. She appeared unwilling to let others know what this affection really was in its depth and fulness; it seemed to be intuitively preserved in the most sacred privacy of her own heart, as if the feeling had been part of her religion, or rather a religion in itself.

Her love for her new mother was returned by that mother with equal fervour. From the day when little Mary appeared at her bedside, Mrs. Blyth felt, to use her own expression, as if a new strength had been given her to enjoy her new happiness. Brighter hopes, better health, calmer resignation, and purer peace seemed to follow the child's footsteps and be inherent in her very presence, as she moved to and fro in the sick room. All the difficulties of communicating with her and teaching her, which her misfortune rendered inevitable, and which might sometime have been felt tedious by others, were so many sources of happiness, so many exquisite occupations of once-weary time to Mrs. Blyth. All declared that the child had succeeded where doctors, and luxuries, and the sufferer's own resignation had hitherto failed—for she had succeeded in endowing Mrs. Blyth with a new life. A fresh object for the affections of the heart

and the thoughts of the mind, is a fresh life for every feeling and thinking being, in sickness as in health.

As her education proceeded, many striking peculiarities became developed in Madonna's disposition, which seemed all more or less produced by the necessary influence of her affliction on the formation of her character. The social isolation to which that affliction condemned her, the solitude of thought and feeling into which it forced her, tended to make her mind remarkably self-reliant. Her first impression of strangers seemed to decide her opinion of them at once. She liked or disliked heartily; estimating apparently from considerations entirely irrespective of age, or sex, or appearance. Sometimes, the very person thought certain to attract her, proved absolutely repulsive—sometimes, people, who, in Mr. Blyth's opinion, were sure to be unwelcome visitors, turned out to be people whom she took a violent liking to. She always betrayed pleasure or uneasiness in the society of others with diverting candour—showing the extremest anxiety to attract those she liked; running away and hiding like a child from those she disliked. There were some, in this latter class, whom no persuasion could induce her to see a second time.

In small things as well as in great, Valentine never forgot that her happiness was his own especial care. He was more nervously watchful over her than anyone else in the house—for she cost him those secret anxieties which make the objects of our love doubly precious. In all the years that she had lived under his roof, he had never conquered his dread that Madonna might be one day traced and discovered by her father, or by relatives, who might have a claim to her. Under this apprehension he had written to Dr. Joyce and Mrs. Peckover a day or two after the child's first entry under his roof, pledging both the persons whom he addressed to the strictest secrecy in all that related to Madonna and to the circumstances which had made her his adopted child. As for the hair bracelet, if his conscience had allowed him, he would have destroyed it; but feeling that this would be a breach of trust, he was fain to be content with locking it up, as well as the pocket-handkerchief, in an old bureau in his painting-room, the key of which he kept attached to his watch chain.

Not one of his London friends knew how he first met with Madonna. He boldly baffled all inquiry by requesting that they would consider her history before she came into his house as a blank, and by simply presenting her as his adopted child. This

method of silencing curiosity succeeded to admiration ; but at the expense of Mr. Blyth's moral character. Persons who knew little or nothing of his real disposition and early life, shook their heads, and laughed in secret ; asserting that the mystery was plain enough to the most ordinary capacity, and that the young lady could be nothing more nor less than a natural child of his own.

Mrs. Blyth was far more indignant at this than her husband, when in due time it reached the painter's house. Valentine rather approved of the scandal than not, because it was likely to lead inquisitive people wrong. He might have been now perfectly easy about the preservation of his secret, but for the distrust which still clung to him, in spite of himself, on the subject of Mrs. Peckover's discretion. He never wearied of warning that excellent woman to be careful in keeping the important secret, every time she came to see Madonna. Whether she paid them a visit for a day, and then went away ; or whether she spent Christmas with them, Valentine's greeting always ended with the same question :—"Excuse me for asking, Mrs. Peckover, but are you sure you have kept what you know about Mary and her mother, and dates and places and all that, hidden from prying people, since you were here last?" At which point Mrs. Peckover generally answered by repeating, always with sarcastic emphasis :—"Properly hidden, did you say, sir? Of course I keep what I know properly hidden, for I can hold my tongue. In my time, sir, it used always to take two people to play at Hide and Seek. Who in the world is seeking little Mary, I should like to know?"

CHAPTER VIII.

MENTOR AND TELEMACHUS.

It is some time since we left Mr. Blyth and Madonna in the studio. The first was engaged, it may be remembered, in brushing of Bacchanalian Nymphs in the foreground of a Classical landscape. The second was modestly occupied in making a copy of the head of the Venus de' Medici.

The clock strikes one—and a furious ring is heard.

"There he is!" cries Mr. Blyth. "There's Zack! I know his ring; it's worse than the postman's; it's like an alarm of fire!"

Here Valentine drums gently with his mahl-stick on the floor. Madonna looks towards him; he waves his hand round and round rapidly above his head. This is the sign which means "Zack." The girl smiles brightly and blushes. Zack is one of her favourites.

Valentine's father, and Mrs. Thorpe's father (the Mr. Goodworth who figures at the beginning of this narrative), had been intimate associates. The friendly intercourse spread, naturally, to the sons and daughters who formed their respective families. From the time of Mr. Thorpe's marriage to Miss Goodworth, however, the connection between the junior Goodworths and Blyths began to grow less intimate—so far, at least, as the new bride and Valentine were concerned. The rigid Puritan of Baregrove Square, and the eccentric votary of the Fine Arts, disapproved of each other. Visits of ceremony were exchanged at intervals; but even these were discontinued on Madonna's arrival under Valentine's roof: Mr. Thorpe being one of the first who suspected her to be the painter's natural child. An almost complete separation ensued for some years, until Zack grew up to boy's estate, and was taken to see Valentine, one day, by his father. He and the painter became friends. Mr. Blyth liked boys, and boys liked him. From this time, Zack frequented Valentine's house at every opportunity, and never neglected his artist friend. At the date of this story, one of the many points in his son's conduct of which Mr. Thorpe disapproved on high moral grounds, was the determination the lad showed to keep up his intimacy with Mr. Blyth.

Zack's approach was heralded by a scuffling of feet, loud talking, and a great deal of giggling on the part of the housemaid, who let him in. Suddenly these sounds ceased—the door was dashed open—and Mr. Thorpe, junior, burst into the room.

"Dear old Blyth! how are you?" cried Zack. "Have you had any leap-frog, since I was here? Jump up, and let's celebrate my return to the painting-room with manly exercise in our old way. Come on! I'll give the first back. Put down your palette; and one, two, three—and over!"

Pronouncing these words, Zack ran to the end of the room opposite to Valentine; and signalled his entry by giving its owner, what is termed in the technical language of leap-frog, "a capital back."

Mr. Blyth put down his palette, brushes, and mahl-stick—tucked up his cuffs and smiled—took a little trial skip into the

air—and, running down the room with the slightly tremulous step of a gentleman of fifty, cleared Zack in gallant style; fell on the other side, all in a lump on his hands and feet; gave the return "back" conscientiously, at the other end of the studio; and was leapt over in an instant, with a shout of triumph, by Zack. The athletic ceremonies concluded, the two shook hands.

"Too stiff, Blyth—too stiff by half," said young Thorpe. "I haven't kept you up in your gymnastics lately. We must have more leap-frog in the garden, and I'll bring my boxing gloves next time, and open your chest by teaching you to fight. Splendid exercise, and good for your liver."

Delivering this opinion, Zack ran off to Madonna, who had been keeping the Venus de' Medici from being shaken down, while she looked at the leap-frog. "How is the dearest, prettiest love in the world?" cried Zack, taking her hand, and kissing it with boisterous fondness. "Ah! she lets other old friends kiss her cheek, and only lets me kiss her hand!—I say, Blyth, I'll lay you two to one she's guessed what I've been saying to her."

A bright flush overspread the girl's face while Zack addressed her. Her blue eyes looked up at him, shyly conscious of the pleasure their expression was betraying; and the neat folds of her grey dress, which had lain so still over her bosom when she was drawing, began to rise and fall gently now, when Zack was holding her hand. If young Thorpe had not been the most thoughtless of human beings—as much a boy still, in many respects, as when he was locked up in his father's dressing-room—he might have guessed long ago why he was the only old friend whom she did not permit to kiss her on the cheek!

But Zack neither guessed, nor thought of guessing, anything of this sort. His flighty thoughts flew in a moment from the young lady to his cigar-case; and he walked away to the hearth-rug, twisting a piece of paper into a lighter as he went.

When Madonna returned to her drawing, her eyes wandered timidly once or twice to where Zack was standing, when she thought he was not looking at her; and assuredly young Thorpe was handsome enough to tempt any woman into glancing at him with approving eyes. He was over six feet in height; and, though little more than nineteen, well developed in proportion to his stature. Boxing, rowing, and other athletic exercises had done wonders towards bringing his naturally vigorous, upright frame to the perfection of healthy muscular condition. Tall

and strong as he was, there was nothing ungainly in his movements. He had quick, mischievous, grey eyes—a thoroughly English red and white complexion, bright and regular teeth, and curly brown hair, with a peculiar golden tinge in it, only visible when his head was placed in a particular light.

“I say, Blyth, do you and Madonna mind smoke?” asked Zack, lighting his cigar before there was time to answer him.

“No, no,” said Valentine. “But, Zack, you wrote me that your father had taken your cigars from you ——”

“So he has, and all my pocket-money. But I’ve taken to helping myself, and I’ve some splendid cigars. Try one, Blyth,” said the young gentleman, luxuriously puffing out smoke through each nostril.

“Taken to helping yourself!” exclaimed Mr. Blyth. “What do you mean?”

“Oh!” said Zack, “don’t be afraid. It’s only barter. This is how it is. A junior clerk in our office has three dozen cigars, and I have two staring flannel shirts, only fit for a snob. The junior clerk gives me the three dozen cigars, and I give the junior clerk the two staring flannel shirts. That’s barter, and barter’s commerce. It’s all my father’s fault; he will make a tradesman of me. Dutiful behaviour, isn’t it, to be doing a bit of commerce already on my own account?”

“I’ll tell you what, Zack,” said Mr. Blyth, “I don’t like the way you’re going on. Your last letter made me very uneasy.

“You can’t be half as uneasy as I am,” rejoined Zack. “I’m jolly enough here, because I can’t help it; but at home I’m the most miserable devil on earth. My father baulks me in everything, and makes me turn hypocrite, and take him in, in all sorts of ways—which I hate doing; and yet can’t help doing, because he forces me. Why does he want to make me live in the same slow way that he does, Why does he bully me about being home by eleven? Why does he force me into a tea-merchant’s office, when I want to be an artist? I’m a perfect slave to commerce already. What do you think? I’m supposed to be sampling in the city at this moment. The junior clerk’s doing the work for me; and he’s to have one of my dress-waistcoats to compensate him. First my shirts; then my waistcoat; then my—confound it, I shall be stripped to the skin if this sort of thing goes on!”

“Gently, Zack, gently. What would your father say if he heard you?”

"Oh, yes! it's all very well, you humbug, to shake your head; but you wouldn't like being forced into an infernal tea-shop, and having your pocket-money stopped—I won't stand it—I have the patience of Job—but I won't stand it! My mind's made up: I want to be an artist, and I will be an artist. Don't lecture, Blyth—it's no use; just tell me how I'm to begin learning to draw."

Here Zack touched Valentine on his weak point. Art was his grand topic; and to ask his advice on that was to administer sweetest flattery. He wheeled his chair round directly, so as to face young Thorpe. "If you're set on being an artist," he began enthusiastically, "I fancy, Master Zack, I'm the man to help you. First, purify your taste by copying the glorious works of Greek sculpture—in short, form yourself on the Antique. Look there!—just what Madonna's doing; she's forming herself on the Antique."

Zack went to look at Madonna's drawing, the outline of which was finished. "Beautiful! Ah! confound it! yes! the glorious Greeks, and so forth, just as you say, Blyth. A most wonderful drawing! the finest thing of the kind I ever saw!" Here he transferred his superlatives to his fingers, communicating them to Madonna through the medium of the deaf and dumb alphabet, which he had superficially mastered with extraordinary rapidity under Mr. and Mrs. Blyth's tuition. Whatever Zack's friends did Zack always admired with wildest enthusiasm. Any knowledge of what he praised, or why he praised it, was a slight superfluity of which he never felt the want. If Madonna had been a great astronomer, and had shown him pages of mathematical calculations, he would have overwhelmed her with eulogies just as glibly as—by means of the finger alphabet—he was overwhelming her now.

But Valentine's pupil was used to be criticised as well as praised; and her head was in no danger of being turned by Zack's admiration of her drawing. Looking up at him with a sly expression of incredulity, she signed these words in reply: "It ought to be much better than it is. Do you really like it?" Zack rejoined impetuously by a fresh torrent of superlatives. She watched his face, for a moment, rather anxiously, then bent quickly over her drawing. He walked back to Valentine. Her eyes followed him—then returned once more to the paper before her. The colour began to rise again in her cheek; she played nervously with the port-crayon that held her black and white

chalk; looked attentively at the drawing; and, smiling at some fancy of her own, proceeded assiduously with her employment, altering and amending, as she went on, with more than usual care.

What was Madonna thinking of? If she had been willing and able, to utter her thoughts, she might have expressed them thus: "I wonder whether he likes my drawing? Shall I try if I can't make it better worth pleasing him? I will! it shall be the best I have ever done. And then, when it is finished, I will take it to Mrs. Blyth to give as my present to Zack."

"Look," said Valentine, turning from his picture towards Madonna, "look, my boy, how carefully that dear girl is working from the Antique! Only copy her example, and you may be able to draw from the life in less than a year."

"You don't say so? I should like to begin at once. But look here, Blyth, when you say, 'draw from the life,' there can't be the smallest doubt about what you mean—but, at the same time, if you would only be less professional in expressing yourself ——"

"Good heavens, Zack, in what barbarous ignorance your parents have brought you up! 'Drawing from the life,' means drawing the living human figure from the living human being which sits at a shilling an hour, and calls itself a model."

"To be sure! Some of these very models whose names are chalked up over your fireplace?—Delightful! Glorious! Drawing from the life—just the thing I long for. Hullo!" exclaimed Zack, reading the memoranda it was Blyth's habit to scrawl as they occurred to him, on the wall over the chimney-piece—"Hullo! here's a woman-model; 'Amelia Bibby'—Blyth! let me dash at once into drawing from life, and begin with Amelia Bibby."

"Nothing of the sort," said Valentine. "You may end with Amelia Bibby, when you are fit to study at the Royal Academy. She's a capital model, and so is her sister. The worst of it is, they quarrelled a little while ago; and now, if an artist has Sophia, Amelia won't come. And Sophia returns the compliment, and won't sit to Amelia's friends. It's awkward for people who used to employ both, as I did."

"What did they quarrel about?" inquired Zack.

"A tea-pot," answered Mr. Blyth. "They are daughters of one of the late king's footmen, and are desperately proud of their aristocratic origin. They used to live together, happy as birds, without a hard word being spoken between them, till, one day,

they happened to break their tea-pot, which set them talking about getting a new one. Sophia said it ought to be earthenware, like the last; Amelia contradicted her, and said it ought to be metal. Sophia said the aristocracy used earthenware; Amelia said the aristocracy used metal. Sophia said she was oldest, and knew best; Amelia said she was youngest, and knew better. Sophia said Amelia was impudent; Amelia said Sophia was plebeian. From that moment, they parted. Sophia drinks tea out of earthenware; Amelia drinks tea out of metal. They swear never to make it up, and abuse each other furiously. Very shocking, isn't it, Zack?"

"Oh, capital! A perfect piece of human nature to us men of the world," exclaimed the young gentleman, with the air of a philosopher. "But, which is prettiest, Amelia or Sophia? Metal or Earthenware? My mind's made up to study from the best-looking of the two, if you have no objection."

"I have the strongest possible objection Zack, to talking nonsense where a serious question is concerned. Are you in earnest in your resolution to be an artist?"

"I mean to be a painter, or to leave home," answered Zack, resolutely. "If you don't help me, I'll be off as sure as fate! I have half a mind to cut the office from this moment. Lend me a shilling, Blyth; and I'll toss up for it. Heads—liberty and the fine arts! Tails—the tea-merchant!"

"If you don't go back to the City to-day," said Valentine, "and stick to your engagements, I wash my hands of you—but if you promise to show all the attention you can to your father's wishes, I'll teach you myself to draw from the Antique. If somebody can be found who has influence enough with your father to get him to enter you at the Royal Academy, you must be prepared with a drawing that's fit to show. Now, if you promise to be good you shall come here, and learn the A B C of Art every evening. We'll have a little academy," continued Valentine, putting down his palette, and rubbing his hands in glee; "and if it isn't too much for Lavvie, the evening studies shall take place in her room; and she shall draw, poor soul, as well as the rest of us. There's an idea for you, Zack! Mr. Blyth's Drawing Academy, open every evening—with light refreshments for industrious students. What do you say?"

"Say? by George, I'll come every night, and get through acres of chalk and miles of drawing paper!" cried Zack, catching all Valentine's enthusiasm. "Let's go up and tell Mrs. Blyth."

"Stop a minute, Zack," interposed Mr. Blyth. "What time ought you to be back in the City? it's close on two."

"Oh! three will do. I've lots of time—I can walk it in half-an-hour."

"You have got about ten minutes more," said Valentine in his firmest manner. "Occupy them, if you like, in going up stairs to Mrs. Blyth, and take Madonna with you. I'll follow."

Saying those words, Mr. Blyth walked to where Madonna was still at work. She was so deeply engaged over her drawing that she had never looked up from it, for the last quarter-of-an-hour; and when Valentine passed her shoulder approvingly, and made her a sign to leave off, she answered by a gesture of entreaty, which implored him to let her proceed a little longer with her employment. She had never at other times claimed an indulgence of this kind, when drawing from the Antique—but then, she had never, at other times, been occupied in making a copy intended as a present for Zack.

Valentine, however, induced her to relinquish her port-crayon. He laid his hand on his heart, the sign adopted to indicate Mrs. Blyth. Madonna started up immediately.

Zack, having thrown away the end of his cigar, gallantly advanced and offered his arm. As she approached, rather shyly, to take it, he also laid his hand on his heart, and pointed up stairs. The gesture was enough for her. She understood at once that they were going together to Mrs. Blyth.

"Whether Zack turns out a painter or not," said Valentine to himself, as the door closed on the two young people, "I believe I have hit on the best plan for keeping him steady. As long as he comes to me regularly, he can't break out at night, and get into mischief. The more I think of that notion the better I like it. I shouldn't wonder if my evening Academy doesn't work the reformation of Zack!"

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When Mr. Blyth pronounced those words, if he could only have looked into the future—if he could only have suspected how strangely the home-interests dearest to his heart were connected with his success in working the reformation of Zack—the smile now on his face would have left it; and, for the first time in his life, he would have sat before one of his own pictures, an unhappy man.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIBULATIONS OF ZACK.

A specimen has already been presented of Mr. Thorpe's method of educating his son, at six years old, by making him attend a church service of two hours in length; as, also, of the manner in which he sought to drill the child into premature discipline by dint of Sabbath restrictions and Select Bible Texts. When that child grew to a boy, and when the boy developed to a young man, Mr. Thorpe's educational system still persisted in being what it had always been from the first. His idea of Religion defined it to be a system of prohibitions; and, by a natural consequence, his idea of Education defined that to be a system of prohibitions also.

His method of bringing up his son once settled, no earthly consideration could move him from it an inch. No matter with what arguments the surviving members of Mrs. Thorpe's family assailed him, the same two replies were invariably shot back at them in turn from the parental quiver. Mr. Thorpe calmly—always calmly—said, first, that he “would never compound with vice” (which was what nobody asked him to do), and, secondly, that he would, in no instance, great or small, “consent to act from a principle of expediency:” this last assertion, in the case of Zack, being about equivalent to saying that if he set out to walk due north, and met a lively young bull galloping with his head down, due south, he would not consent to save his bones, or yield the animal space enough to run on, by stepping aside a single inch.

“My son requires unremitting parental discipline,” Mr. Thorpe remarked, in explanation of his motives for forcing Zack to adopt a commercial career. “When he is not under my own eye, he must be under the eyes of devout friends, in whom I can place confidence. One of these devout friends is ready to receive him into his counting-house; to keep him industriously occupied from nine in the morning till six in the evening; to surround him with estimable examples; and to share with me the solemn responsibility of managing his moral and religious training. Persons who ask me to allow motives of this awfully important nature to be modified in the smallest degree by considerations connected with the lad's natural disposition (which has been a grief to me from his childhood); with his bodily

gifts of the flesh (which have hitherto only served to keep him from the cultivation of the gifts of the spirit); or with his own desires (which I know by bitter experience to be of the world, worldly);—persons, I say, who ask me to do any of these things, ask me to act from a godless principle of expediency, and to violate moral rectitude by impiously compounding with vice.”

Acting on such principles of parental discipline, Mr. Thorpe believed that he had done his duty, when he had at last forced his son into the merchant's office. He had, in truth, perpetrated one of the most serious mistakes possible for a wrong-headed father to commit. For once, Zack had not exaggerated in saying that his aversion to a counting-house amounted to absolute horror. His physical peculiarities, and the habits they had entailed on him from boyhood, made life in the open air, and the constant use of his hardy thews and sinews a constitutional necessity. He felt—and there was no self-delusion in the feeling—that he should mope and pine, like a wild animal in a cage, under confinement in an office, only varied from morning to evening by commercial walking expeditions of a mile or two in crowded streets. These forebodings—to say nothing of his natural yearning towards adventure, change of scene, and exhilarating bodily exertion—would have been sufficient to have decided him to leave his home, and battle his way through the world (he cared not how, so long as he battled it freely), but for one consideration. Reckless as he was, that consideration stayed his feet on the brink of a sacred threshold which he dared not pass, perhaps to leave it for ever—the threshold of his mother's door.

Strangely as it expressed itself, and irregularly as it influenced his conduct, Zack's love for his mother was yet, in its own nature, a beautiful element in his character; full of promise for the future if his father had been able to discover it, and wise enough to be guided by the discovery. As to outward expression, the lad's fondness for Mrs. Thorpe was a boisterous, inconsiderate, unsentimental fondness, noisily in harmony with his thoughtless, rattle-pated disposition. It swayed him by fits and starts; influencing him to patience and forbearance at one time; abandoning him, to all appearance, at another. But it was genuine fondness, nevertheless—however often heedlessness and temptation might overpower the still small voice in which its impulses spoke to his conscience, and pleaded with his heart.

Among other unlucky results of Mr. Thorpe's conscientious

imprisonment of his son in a merchant's office, was the vast increase which Zack's commercial penance produced in his natural appetite for the amusements of the town. After nine hours of ungrateful daily labour, the sight of play-bills and other advertisements of places of public recreation appealed to him with irresistible fascination.

Mr. Thorpe drew the line of demarcation between permissible and forbidden evening amusements at lecture-rooms, and oratorio performances. All gates opening on the outer side of the boundary thus laid down, were gates of Vice—gates that no son of his should ever be allowed to pass. The domestic laws which obliged Zack to be home every night at eleven, and forbade the possession of a door-key, were directed especially to the purpose of closing against him the forbidden entrances to theatres and public gardens—places of resort which Mr. Thorpe characterised, in a strain of devout allegory, as “Labyrinths of National Infamy.” It was useless to suggest to the father (as some of Zack's maternal relatives did suggest), that the son was originally descended from Eve, and consequently possessed of an hereditary tendency to pluck at forbidden fruit; and that his disposition and age made it a certainty, that if he were restrained from enjoying openly the amusements most attractive to him, he would probably end in enjoying them by stealth. Mr. Thorpe met arguments of this kind by registering his usual protest against “compounding with vice;” and then drew the reins of discipline tighter than ever, by way of warning off intrusive hands from attempting to relax them.

Before long, the evil results predicted by the opponents of the father's plan for preventing the son from indulging in public amusements, occurred. At first Zack gratified his taste for the drama, by going to the theatre whenever he felt inclined; leaving early enough to get home by eleven, and candidly acknowledging how he had occupied the evening, when the question was asked at breakfast. This frankness of confession was always rewarded by threats, and reiterated prohibitions, administered by Mr. Thorpe with a crushing assumption of superiority to every mitigating argument or excuse that his son could urge, which often irritated Zack into answering defiantly, and repeating his offence. Finding that menaces and reproofs only ended in making the lad illtempered and insubordinate for days, Mr. Thorpe so far distrusted his own powers of correction as to call in the aid of his clerical adviser, the Reverend Aaron Yollop; under whose

ministry he sat, and whose portrait, in lithograph, hung on the dining-room wall at Baregrove Square.

Mr. Yollop's interference was weighty enough to produce positive and immediate result: it drove Zack to the last limits of human endurance. The reverend gentleman's imperturbable self possession defied the young rebel's utmost powers of irritating reply, no matter how vigorously he might exert them. Once vested with the paternal commission to rebuke, prohibit, and lecture, as the spiritual pastor and master of Mr. Thorpe's disobedient son, Mr. Yollop flourished in his vocation in exact proportion to the resistance offered. He derived grim encouragement from the wildest explosions of Zack's fury at being interfered with by a man who had no claim of relationship over him, and who gloried in experimenting on him, as a finely-complicated case of spiritual disease. Thrice did Mr. Yollop, in his capacity of a moral surgeon, operate on his patient, and triumph in the responsive yells which his curative exertions elicited. At the fourth visit of attendance, however, every angry symptom suddenly and marvellously disappeared before the first significant flourish of the clerical knife. Mr. Yollop has triumphed where Mr. Thorpe had failed! The case which had defied lay treatment had yielded to the parsonic cure; and Zack, the rebellious, was tamed at last into spending his evenings in decorous dulness at home!

It never occurred to Mr. Yollop to doubt, or to Mr. Thorpe to ascertain, whether the young gentleman really went to bed, after he had retired, at the proper hour, to his sleeping room. They saw him come home from business sullenly docile and speechlessly subdued, take his dinner and his book in the evening and go up stairs, after the house door had been bolted for the night. They saw him thus acknowledge, by outward proof, that he was crushed into submission; and the sight satisfied them. No men are so short-sighted as persecuting men. Both Mr. Thorpe and his coadjutor were persecutors on principle, wherever they encountered opposition; and consequently incapable of looking beyond immediate results. The truth was they had done something more than discipline the lad. They had worried his native virtues of frankness and fair-dealing out of his heart; they had beaten him back, inch by inch, into the miry refuge of duplicity. Zack was deceiving them.

Eleven o'clock was the hour for going to bed at Baregrove Square. Zack's first proceeding on entering his room was to

open his window softly, put on an old travelling cap, and light a cigar. It was December at that time; but his hardy constitution rendered him as impervious to cold as a Polar bear. Having smoked for half an hour, he listened at his door till the silence in Mr. Thorpe's dressing-room assured him that his father was safe in bed, and invited him to descend on tiptoe—with his boots under his arm—into the hall. Here he placed his candle, with a box of matches, on a chair, and proceeded to open the house door with the noiseless dexterity of a burglar—being always careful to facilitate the safe performance of this dangerous operation by keeping lock, bolt, and hinges well oiled. Having secured the key, blown out the candle, and noiselessly closed the door, he left the house, and started for the Haymarket, Covent Garden, or the Strand, a little before midnight—or, in other words, set forth on a nocturnal tour of amusement, just at the time when the doors of respectable places of public recreation (which his father prevented him from attending) were closed, and the doors of disreputable places thrown open.

One precaution did Zack observe while enjoying the dangerous diversions into which paternal prohibitions, assisted by filial perversity, now thrust him. He took care to keep sober enough to get home before the servants had risen, and to be certain of preserving his steadiness of hand and stealthiness of foot, while bolting the door and stealing up stairs for an hour or two of bed. Knowledge of his own perilous weakness of brain, as a drinker, rendered him thus uncharacteristically temperate, so far as indulgence in strong liquor was concerned. His first glass of grog comforted him; his second agreeably excited him; his third (as he knew by experience) reached his weak point on a sudden, and robbed him treacherously of his sobriety.

Three or four times a week, for nearly a month, had he now enjoyed his unhallowed nocturnal rambles—keeping them secret even from Mr. Blyth, whose toleration, expansive as it was, he knew would not extend to viewing leniently such offences as haunting night-houses at two in the morning, while his father believed him safe in bed. But one mitigating circumstance can be urged in connection with the course of misconduct which he was now following. He had grace enough left to feel ashamed of his duplicity, when he was in his mother's presence.

But circumstances unhappily kept him too much apart from Mrs. Thorpe, and so prevented the natural growth of a good feeling, which flourished only under her influence: and which,

had it been suffered to arrive at maturity, might have led to his reform. All day he was at the office, and his inksome life there only inclined him to look forward with malicious triumph to the secret frolic of the night. Then, in the evening, Mr. Thorpe often thought it advisable to harangue him seriously, by way of not letting the reformed rake relapse for want of encouraging admonition of the moral sort. Nor was Mr. Yollop behindhand in taking similar precautions to secure the new convert permanently, after having once caught him. Every word these two spoke served to harden the lad, and to deaden the reproving and reclaiming influence of his mother. "I should get nothing by it, even if I could turn over a new leaf," thought Zack, shrewdly and angrily, when his father or his father's friend favoured him with improving advice: "Here they are, worrying away again already at their pattern good boy to make him a better."

Such was the point at which the Tribulations of Zack had arrived, when Mr. Blyth resolved to set up a domestic Drawing Academy in his wife's room; with the double purpose of amusing his family circle in the evening, and reforming his wild young friend by teaching him to draw from the "glorious Antique."

CHAPTER X.

MR. BLYTH'S DRAWING ACADEMY.

When Mrs. Blyth felt strong enough to receive company in her room, Valentine sent the promised invitation to Zack which summoned him to his first drawing-lesson.

Seven o'clock had been fixed as the hour at which the business of the academy was to begin. Always punctual, wherever his professional engagements were concerned, Valentine put the finishing touches to his preparations as the clock struck; and perching himself gaily on a corner of Mrs. Blyth's couch, surveyed his drawing-boards, his lamps, and the plaster cast set up for his pupils to draw from, with bland triumph.

"Now, Lavvie," he said, "before Zack comes and confuses me, I'll check off the drawing things one after another, to make sure that nothing's left down stairs in the studio, which ought to be here."

As her husband said these words, Mrs. Blyth touched Madonna gently on the shoulder. For some time the girl had been sitting

thoughtfully, her head bent down, her cheek resting on her hand, and a bright smile parting her lips. The affliction which separated her from the worlds of hearing and speech—which set her apart among her fellow-creatures, a solitary living being in a sphere of death-silence that others might approach, but might never enter—gave touching significance to the meditative stillness that often passed over her suddenly, even in the society of her adopted parents, and of friends all talking around her. Sometimes, the thoughts by which she was thus absorbed—thoughts only indicated to others by the shadow of their mysterious presence, moving in the expression that passed over her face—held her long under their influence: sometimes they seemed to die away in her mind almost as suddenly as they had arisen. It was one of Valentine's eccentric fancies that she was not meditating only, at such times as these, but that, deaf and dumb as she was with creatures of this world, she could talk with the angels, and hear what the heavenly voices said in return.

The moment she was touched on the shoulder, she looked up, and nestled close to her adopted mother; who, passing one arm around her neck, explained to her, by means of signs, what Valentine was saying.

Nothing was more characteristic of Mrs. Blyth's affectionate consideration for Madonna than this little action. The kindest rarely think it necessary, in communicating by the fingers with the deaf, to keep them informed of any ordinary conversation which may be proceeding. Wise disquisitions, witty sayings, are conveyed to their minds, as a matter of course; but the little chatty nothings of everyday talk, which pleasantly and constantly employ our speaking and address our hearing faculties, are thought too fugitive in their nature to be worthy of transmission by interpreting fingers or pens, and are consequently seldom communicated to the deaf. No deprivation attending their affliction is more severely felt than the special deprivation which thus ensues; and which exiles their sympathies, in a great measure, from all share in the familiar social interests of life around them.

Mrs. Blyth's kind heart and devoted affection for her adopted child, had long since impressed it on her, as the first of duties, to prevent Madonna from feeling the excluding influences of her calamity, while in the society of others, by keeping her well informed of the many conversations, jesting or earnest, held in her presence in the invalid-room. For years, Mrs. Blyth's nimble

fingers had been accustomed to interpret all that was said by her bedside before the deaf and dumb girl, as they were interpreting now.

"Just stop me, Lavvie, if I miss anything, in making sure I've all that's wanted for everybody's lesson," said Valentine, preparing to reckon up the list of his materials, by placing his right forefinger on his left thumb. "First, there's the statue to draw from—the Dying Gladiator. Secondly, the drawing-boards and paper. Thirdly, the black and white chalk. Fourthly,—where are the port-crayons? In the painting-room, of course. No! no! don't trouble Madonna to fetch them. Tell her to poke the fire instead: I'll be back directly." And Mr. Blyth skipped out of the room as if he had been fifteen instead of fifty.

No sooner was Valentine's back turned than Mrs. Blyth's hand was passed under the swan's-down coverlet that lay over her couch in search of something hidden beneath it. In a moment the hand reappeared, holding a chalk drawing, neatly framed. It was Madonna's copy from the head of the Venus—the same which Zack had honoured with his superlative exaggeration of praise at his last visit. She had not forgotten her purpose of making him a present of the drawing which he had admired. It had been finished with the utmost care she could bestow; had been put into a pretty frame, paid for out of her own little savings; and was now hidden under Mrs. Blyth's coverlet, to be drawn forth as a surprise for Zack, and for Valentine too, that evening.

After looking once or twice backwards and forwards between the copyist and the copy, her pale face beaming with quiet merriment, Mrs. Blyth laid down the drawing, and began talking with her fingers to Madonna.

"So you will not even let me tell Valentine who this is for?" were the words she signed.

The girl was sitting with her back half turned on the drawing; glancing at it quickly from time to time with a strange shyness and indecision, as if the work of her hands had undergone some transformation which make her doubt whether she was any longer privileged to look at it. She shook her head in reply, then moved round suddenly on her chair; her fingers playing nervously with the fringes of the coverlet.

"We all like Zack," proceeded Mrs. Blyth, enjoying the amusement her womanly instincts extracted from Madonna's confusion; "but you must like him very much to take more

pains with this particular drawing than with any you ever did."

This time Madonna neither looked up nor moved in her chair, her fingers working more and more nervously amid the fringe; her cheeks, neck, and bosom answered for her.

Mrs. Blyth touched her shoulder, and, placing the drawing again under the coverlet, made her look up, while signing these words.

"I shall give the drawing to Zack soon after he comes in. It is sure to make him happy for the evening.

Madonna's eyes followed Mrs. Blyth's fingers eagerly; then rose softly to her face with the same wistful, questioning look they had assumed before Valentine, years ago, when he first interfered to protect her in the circus. There was such irresistible tenderness in the faint smile that wavered about her lips; such sadness of innocent beauty in her face, now growing a shade paler than it was wont to be, that Mrs. Blyth's expression became serious the instant their eyes met. She drew the girl forward and kissed her. The kiss was returned many times, with a passionate warmth and eagerness remarkably at variance with the usual gentleness of Madonna's actions. What had changed her? Before it was possible to inquire, she had broken away from the kind arms round her, and was kneeling with her face hidden in the pillows that lay over the head of the couch.

"I must quiet her. I ought to make her feel that this is wrong," said Mrs. Blyth to herself, looking startled and grieved as she withdrew her hand wet with tears, after trying vainly to raise the girl's face. "She has been thinking too much lately—too much about that drawing; too much, I am afraid, about Zack."

At that moment Mr. Blyth opened the door. Feeling the slight shock, as he let it bang to after entering, Madonna started up and ran to the fireplace. Valentine did not notice her.

He bustled about the neighbourhood of the Dying Gladiator, talking incessantly, arranging his port-crayons, and trimming the lamps that lit the model. Mrs. Blyth cast many an anxious look towards the fireplace. After a few minutes Madonna turned round and came to the couch. The traces of tears had disappeared from her face. She made a little appealing gesture that asked Mrs. Blyth to be silent about what had happened; kissed, as a sign that she wished to be forgiven, the hand held out to her; and then sat quietly again in her accustomed place.

At the same time a voice was heard talking and laughing

boisterously in the hall. Then followed a whispering, succeeded by a burst of giggling from the housemaid, who presently ascended to Mrs. Blyth's room alone, and entered—after an explosion of suppressed laughter behind the door—holding out at arm's length a pair of boxing-gloves.

"If you please, sir," said the girl, addressing Valentine, and tittering hysterically, "Master Zack's down stairs, and he says you're to be so kind as put on these (he's putting another pair on hisself) and give him the pleasure of your company for a few minutes in the painting-room."

"Come on, Blyth," cried the voice. "I told you I should bring the gloves, and make a fighting man of you, last time I was here. Come on! I want to open your chest by knocking you about a little in the painting-room before we begin."

The servant still held the gloves away from her at the full stretch of her arm, as if she feared they were yet alive with pugilistic energies imparted to them by their last wearer. Mrs. Blyth burst out laughing, Valentine followed her example. The housemaid began to look bewildered, and begged to know if her master would take "the things" away from her.

"Did you say, come up stairs?" continued the voice. "All right; I have no objection, if Mrs. Blyth hasn't." Here Zack came in with his boxing-gloves on. "How are you, Blyth? These are the pills for that sluggish liver of yours that you're always complaining of. Put 'em on. Stand with your left leg forward—keep your right leg bent—and fix your eye on me!"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Mr. Blyth, recovering breath enough to assert his dignity as master of the new drawing-school. "Take off those things! What do you mean by coming into my academy in the attitude of a prize-fighter?"

"Don't lose your temper," rejoined Zack; "you will never learn to use your fists prettily if you do. Here, Patty, the boxing lesson's put off till to-morrow. Take the gloves up stairs into your master's dressing-room, and put them into the drawer where his clean shirts are, because they must be kept nice and dry. Shake hands, Mrs. Blyth; it does one good to see you laugh like that. And how is Madonna? I'm afraid she's been sitting before the fire, and trying to spoil her pretty complexion. Why, what's the matter? her hands are quite cold!"

"Come to your lesson, directly," said Valentine, assuming his most despotic voice, and leading the disorderly student by the collar to his place.

"Hullo!" cried Zack, looking at the Dying Gladiator. "The gentleman in plaster's making a face—I'm afraid he isn't well. I say, Blyth, is that the statue of an ancient Greek patient, suffering under the prescription of an ancient Greek physician?"

"Will you hold your tongue and take up your drawing-board?" cried Mr. Blyth. "You young barbarian, you deserve to be expelled my academy for talking in that way of the Dying Gladiator. Now then; where's Madonna? No! stop where you are, Zack. Wait a minute, Lavvie! Let me prop you up comfortably with the pillows before you begin. There! I never saw a more beautiful effect of light and shade than there is on your view of the model. Has everybody got a portcrayon and two bits of chalk? Yes, everybody has. Order! order! order!" shouted Valentine, forgetting his assumed dignity in the exultation of the moment. "Mr. Blyth's drawing academy for the promotion of family Art is now open, and ready for inspection. Hooray!"

"Hooray!" echoed Zack. "I say, Blyth, which chalk do I begin with—the white or the black—eh? Do I start with the what's his name's face? and if so, where am I to begin? With his eyes, or his nose, or his mouth, or the top of his head, or the bottom of his chin—or what?"

"First sketch in the general form with a light stroke, without attention to details," said Mr. Blyth, waving his hand gracefully about his own person. "Then measure with the eye, assisted occasionally by the portcrayon, the proportion of the parts. Then put dots on the paper; a dot where his head comes; another dot where his elbows and knees come, and so forth. Then strike all in boldly—it's impossible to give better advice—strike it in, Zack; strike it in boldly!"

"Here goes at his head and shoulders to begin," said Zack, taking one comprehensive look at the Dying Gladiator, and drawing a huge half-circle, with a preliminary flourish of his hand on the paper. "Oh, confound it, I've broken the chalk!"

"Of course you have," retorted Valentine. "Take another; the Academy grants supplementary chalk to ignorant students, who dig their lines on the paper, instead of drawing them. Now, break off a bit of bread-crumbs, and rub out what you have done. 'Buy a penny loaf, and rub it all out,' as Mr. Fuseli once said to me in the Schools of the Royal Academy, when I showed him my first drawing, and was excessively conceited about it."

"It's no use," replied Jack; "I've tried a dozen times, and I can't draw a Gladiator's nose."

"Can't!" cried Mr. Blyth, "What do you mean by applying the word 'can't' to any process of art in my presence? There, that's the line of the Gladiator's nose. Go over it yourself with this fresh piece of chalk. Come here, and see how Madonna is striking in the figure; the front view, remember, which is the most difficult. She hasn't worked as fast as usual, though. Do you find your view of the model too much for you, my love?" continued Valentine, transferring the last words to his fingers, to communicate them to Madonna.

She shook her head in answer. It was not the difficulty of drawing from the cast before her, but the difficulty of drawing at all, which was retarding her. Her thoughts would wonder to the copy of the Venus hidden under Mrs. Blyth's coverlid; would vibrate between trembling eagerness to see it presented, and groundless apprehension that Zack might, after all, not remember it, or not care to have it when it was given. And as her thoughts wandered, so her eyes followed them. Now she stole an anxious look at Mrs. Blyth, to see if her hand was straying towards the hidden drawing. Now she glanced shyly at Zack—only when he was hardest at work with his port-crayon—to assure herself that he was always in the same good humour, and likely to receive her present kindly, and with some appearance of being pleased to see what pains she had taken. In this way her attention wandered incessantly from her employment; and thus it was that she made less progress than usual, and caused Mr. Blyth to suspect that the task was almost beyond her.

"Splendid beginning, isn't it?" said Zack, looking over her drawing. "I defy the Royal Academy to equal it," continued the young gentleman, scrawling this uncompromising expression of opinion on the space at the bottom of Madonna's drawing, and signing his name with a magnificent flourish.

His arm touched her shoulder while he wrote. She coloured and glanced at him, playfully affecting to look very proud of his sentence of approval—then hurriedly resumed her drawing as their eyes met. He was sent back to his place by Valentine before he could write any more. She took some of the bread-crumbs to rub out what he had written—hesitated as her hand approached the line—coloured deeply, and went on with her drawing, leaving the letters beneath it to remain just as young Thorpe had traced them.

"I shall never draw as well as she does," said Zack, looking at the little he had done with a groan of despair. "I don't think drawing's my forte. It's colour, depend upon it. Wait till I come to that; and see how I'll lay on the paint! Didn't you find drawing infernally difficult, Blyth, when you began?"

"I find it difficult still, Zack," replied Mr. Blyth. "Art wouldn't be glorious if it wasn't difficult from beginning to end; if it didn't force out all the fine points in a man's character as soon as he takes to it. Just eight," continued Valentine, looking at his watch. "Put down your drawing-boards for the present. I pronounce the sitting suspended till after tea."

"Valentine," said Mrs. Blyth, smiling, as she slipped her hand under the coverlid of the couch, "I can't get Madonna to look at me, and I want her. Will you bring her to my bedside?"

"Certainly, my love," returned Mr. Blyth. "You have a double claim on my services to-night, for you have shown yourself the most promising of my pupils. Come here, Zack, and see what Mrs. Blyth had done. The best drawing of the evening!"

"Zack, who had been yawning disconsolately over his own, his fists stuck into his cheeks, and his elbows on his knees, hustled to the couch directly. As he approached, Madonna tried to get back to her former position at the fireplace, but was prevented by Mrs. Blyth, who kept hold of her hand. Just then, Zack fixed his eyes on her and increased her confusion.

"She looks prettier than ever to-night, don't she, Mrs. Blyth?" he said. "I always like her best when her eyes brighten and look twenty different ways in a minute, as they're doing now. She may not be so like Raphael's pictures at such times, I dare say (here he yawned); but for my part—What's she wanting to get away for? And what are you laughing about, Mrs. Blyth? I say, Valentine, there's some joke between the ladies!"

"Do you remember this Zack?" asked Mrs. Blyth, tightening her hold of Madonna with one hand, and producing the framed drawing of the Venus with the other.

"Madonna's copy from my bust of the Venus!" cried Valentine, skipping forward with his accustomed alacrity.

"Madonna's copy from Blyth's bust of the Venus," echoed Jack; his slippery memory not having preserved the slightest recollection of the drawing.

"Dear me! how nicely it's framed, and how beautifully she

has finished it!" pursued Valentine, gently patting Madonna's shoulder in token of high approval.

"Very nicely framed, and beautifully finished, as you say, Blyth," glibly repeated Zack, rising from his chair, and looking perplexed, as he noticed the expression with which Mrs. Blyth was regarding him.

"But who got it framed?" asked Valentine. "She would never have her drawings framed before. I don't understand what it means."

"No more do I," said Zack, dropping back into his chair in lazy astonishment. "Is it some riddle, Mrs. Blyth? Something about why is Madonna like the Venus, eh? If it is, I object to the riddle, because she's a deal prettier than any plaster face ever made. Your face beats Venus's hollow," continued Zack, communicating this bluntly sincere compliment to Madonna by signs.

She smiled as she watched his fingers—perhaps at his mistakes, for he made two in expressing one sentence of five words—perhaps at the compliment, homely as it was.

"Oh! how stupid you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Blyth. "Why, Valentine, it's the easiest thing in the world to guess what she has had the drawing framed for. To make it a present to somebody, of course! And whom does she mean to give it to?"

"Ah! who indeed?" interrupted Zack, sliding down cosily in his chair, and spreading his legs out before him.

"I have a mind to throw the drawing at your head, instead of giving it to you!" cried Mrs. Blyth, losing patience.

"You don't mean to say the drawing's a present to me!" exclaimed Zack, starting from his chair.

"You deserve to have your ears well boxed for not having guessed that it was long ago!" retorted Mrs. Blyth. "Have you forgotten how you praised that very drawing, when you saw it begun in the studio? Didn't you tell Madonna —"

"Oh! the dear, good, generous little soul!" cried Zack, snatching up the drawing, as the truth burst upon him at last. "Tell her on your fingers, Mrs. Blyth, how proud I am of my present. I can't do it with mine, because I can't let go of the drawing. Here, look here!—make her look here, and see how I like it!" And Zack hugged the copy of the Venus to his waistcoat, by way of showing how he prized it.

At this outburst of sentimental pantomime, Madonna raised her head and glanced at young Thorpe. Her face, downcast,

and averted even from Mrs. Blyth's eyes during the last few minutes (as if she had guessed every word that could pain her, out of all that had been said in her presence), brightened again with pleasure as she looked up—with innocent, childish pleasure, that affected no reserve, dreaded no misconstruction, foreboded no disappointment. Her eyes, turning quickly from Zack, and appealing to Valentine, beamed with triumph when he pointed to the drawing, and smilingly raised his hands in astonishment, as a sign that he had been pleasantly surprised by the presentation of her drawing to his new pupil.

"Go on, Mrs. Blyth—you never make mistakes in talking on your fingers, and I always do—go on, please, and tell her how much I thank her," continued Zack, holding out the drawing at arm's length, and looking at it with his head on one side, imitating Valentine's manner of studying his own pictures. "Tell her I'll take such care of it as I never took of anything in my life. I'll hang it up in my bedroom, where I can see it every morning as soon as I awake. Have you told her that?—or shall I write it on her slate? Hullo! here comes the tea. And, by heavens, a bagful of muffins! What!!! the kitchen fire's too black to toast them. I'll undertake the lot in the drawing academy. Here, Patty, give us the toasting-fork: I'm going to begin. I never saw such a splendid fire for toasting muffins in my life!" And Zack fell on his knees at the fire-place, humming "Rule Britannia," and toasting his first muffin in triumph; utterly forgetting that he had left Madonna's drawing neglected, face downwards, on Mrs. Blyth's couch.

Valentine, who suspected nothing, burst out laughing at this specimen of Zack's flightiness. His kind instincts, however, guided his hand at the same moment to the drawing. He took it up carefully, and placed it on a low bookcase at the opposite side of the room. If any increase had been possible in his wife's affection for him, she would have loved him better than ever at the moment he performed that little action.

As her husband removed the drawing, Mrs. Blyth looked at Madonna. The poor girl stood shrinking close to the couch, her hands clasped tightly in front of her, and with no trace of colour left on her cheeks. Her eyes followed Valentine listlessly to the bookcase, then turned towards Zack, not reproachfully nor angrily—not even tearfully—but with that look of patient sadness, of gentle resignation, which used to mark their expression so tenderly in the days of her bondage among the mounte-

banks. So she stood, looking towards the fireplace and the figure kneeling at it, bearing her new disappointment just as she had borne many a former mortification that had tried her while she was yet a child. How carefully she had laboured at that neglected drawing! How happy she had been in anticipating the moment when it would be given to young Thorpe; imagining what he would say on receiving it, and how he would communicate his thanks; wondering what he would do with it; where he would hang it, and whether he would often look at his present! Thoughts such as these had made the moment of presenting that drawing the moment of a great event—and there it was now, placed on one side by other hands; laid down carelessly at the mere entrance of a servant with a tea-tray; neglected for the childish pleasure of kneeling on the hearth-rug, and toasting a muffin!

Mrs. Blyth's sensitively-tempered affection impelled her to take instant and not very merciful notice of Zack's thoughtlessness. Her face flushed, her eyes sparkled, as she turned quickly on her couch. But, before she could utter a word, Madonna's hand was on her lips, and Madonna's eyes fixed with a terrified, imploring expression. The next instant, the girl's trembling fingers rapidly signed these words:—

"Pray—pray don't say anything! I would not have you speak to him just now for the world!"

Mrs. Blyth hesitated, and looked towards Zack. Just at that moment he was turning his muffin and singing louder than ever. The temptation to startle him out of his provoking gaiety by a sharp reproof was almost too strong to be resisted; but Mrs. Blyth forced herself to resist it, nevertheless, for Madonna's sake. She did not, however, communicate with the girl, either by signs or writing, until she had settled herself again in her former position; then her fingers expressed these sentences:—

"If you promise not to let his thoughtlessness distress you, my love, I promise not to speak to him about it. If you do, give me a kiss."

Zack, unconscious of having given pain to one lady and cause of anger to another, had got on to his second muffin, and had changed his song from "Rule Britannia" to the "Lass o' Gowrie," when the hollow, ringing sound of wheels penetrated into the room from the frosty road outside; advancing nearer and nearer, and then suddenly ceasing opposite Mr. Blyth's door.

"Dear me!—that's at our gate," exclaimed Valentine; "who can be coming so late, on such a cold night as this?"

"It's a cab, by the rattling of the wheels, and it brings us the 'Lass o' Gowrie,'" sang Zack, combining the text of his song, and the suggestion of a visitor, in his concluding words.

"Do leave off singing nonsense out of tune, and let us listen when the door opens," said Mrs. Blyth, glad to seize the slightest opportunity of administering reproof.

"Suppose it should be Mr. Gimble, come at last for that picture he has talked of buying so long," exclaimed Valentine.

"Suppose it should be my father!" cried Zack, suddenly turning round on his knees with a blank face. "Or that infernal old Yollop, with his gooseberry eyes and his hands full of tracts. They're both equal to coming after me and spoiling my pleasure here, as they spoil it everywhere else."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Blyth. "The visitor has come in. It can't be Mr. Grimble; he always runs up two stairs at a time."

"And this is one of the heavy-weights. Not an ounce less than sixteen stone, by the step," remarked Zack, letting his muffin burn.

"It can't be that tiresome old Lady Brambledown come to worry you again about altering her picture," said Mrs. Blyth.

"Stop! surely it isn't —" began Valentine. But before he could say another word, the door opened; and, to the amazement of everybody, the servant announced:

"Mrs. Peckover."

CHAPTER XI.

THE BREWING OF THE STORM.

Time had lavishly added to Mrs. Peckover's size, but had taken little from her in exchange. Her hair had certainly turned grey since the period when Valentine first met her; but the good-humoured face beneath was as hearty to look at now as ever. Her cheeks had ruddily expanded; her chin had passed from the double to the triple stage of jovial development—any faint traces of a waist which she might formerly have possessed were obliterated—but it was pleasantly evident, to judge only from her bustling entry into Mrs. Blyth's room, that her active disposition had lost nothing of its energy, and could still defy all corporeal obstructions.

Nodding and smiling, till her vast country bonnet trembled on

her head, the good woman advanced, shaking every object in the room, straight to the tea-table, and enfolded Madonna in her capacious arms. The girl's figure seemed to disappear in a smothering circumambient mass of bonnet ribbons and drapery, as Mrs. Peckover saluted her with a rattling fire of kisses, the report of which was audible above the voluble talking of Mr. Blyth and the boisterous laughter of Zack.

"I'll tell you all about how I came directly, sir; only I couldn't help saying how-d'y-e-do in the old way to little Mary to begin with," said Mrs. Peckover apologetically. It had been impossible to prevail on her to change the familiar name of "little Mary," which she had pronounced so fondly in past years, for the name which superseded it. This worthy creature knew nothing whatever about Raphael; and, considering "Madonna" to be an outlandish foreign word connected with Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot, firmly believed that no respectable Englishwoman ought to compromise her character by attempting to pronounce it.

"I'll tell you, sir—I'll tell you directly why I've come to London," repeated Mrs. Peckover, backing majestically from the tea-table, and rolling round easily on her axis in the direction of the couch to ask for full particulars of Mrs. Blyth's health.

"Much better, my good friend—much better," was the cheerful answer; "but do tell us (for we are so glad to see you!) how you came to surprise us in this way?"

"Well, ma'am," began Mrs. Peckover, "it's almost as great a surprise to be in London, as it is —Be quiet, young Good-for-Nothing; I won't shake hands with you if you don't behave!" These last words she addressed to Zack, whose favourite joke it had always been, from the day of their first acquaintance, to pretend to be in love with her. He was now standing with his arms wide open, the toasting-fork in one hand and the muffin he had burnt in the other, trying to look languishing, and entreating Mrs. Peckover to give him a kiss.

"When you know how to toast a muffin properly, p'raps I may give you one," said she, chuckling as triumphantly over her small retort as if she had been a professed wit. "Do, Mr. Blyth, sir, keep him quiet, or I shan't be able to get on with a word of what I've got to say. Well, ma'am, Doctor Joyce —"

"How is he?" interrupted Valentine, handing Mrs. Peckover a cup of tea.

"He's the best gentleman in the world, sir, but he will have his glass of port after dinner; and he's laid up with the gout."

"And Mrs. Joyce?"

"Laid up too, sir—it's a sick house—laid up with inferlenzer."

"Have any of the children caught the influenza too?" asked Mrs. Blyth. "I hope not."

"No, ma'am, they're all nicely, except the youngest; and it's on account of her that I'm up in London."

"Is the child ill?" asked Valentine. "She's such a picturesque little creature, Lavvie! I long to paint her."

"I'm afraid, sir, she's not fit to be put into a picter now," said Mrs. Peckover. "Mrs. Joyce is in sad trouble about her, because of one of her shoulders which has growed out. The doctor don't doubt but what it may be got right again; but he said she ought to be shown to some London doctor. So, neither her papa nor her mamma being able to take her to her aunt's house, they trusted her to me. Ever since Dr. Joyce got my husband that situation at Rubbleford, I've been about the Rectory, helping with the children and the housekeeping, and all that; and Miss Lucy being used to me we come together. I was glad of the chance of getting here, after not having seen little Mary for so long. So I left Miss Lucy at her aunt's, where they wanted me to stop. But I told them that, thanks to your goodness, I always had a bed here when I was in London; and I took the cab on, after seeing the little girl comfortable. That's how I come to surprise you in this way, ma'am,—and now I'll finish my tea."

Having got to the bottom of her cup, and to the end of a muffin amorously presented by the incorrigible Zack, Mrs. Peckover had leisure to turn again to Madonna; who, having relieved her of her bonnet, was sitting close at her side.

"I didn't think she was looking quite as well as usual, when I first came in," said Mrs. Peckover, patting the girl's cheek with her chubby fingers; "but she seems to have brightened up. Perhaps she's been sticking too close to her drawing lately —"

"By the bye, what's become of my drawing?" cried Zack, suddenly recalled to remembrance of Madonna's gift.

"Dear me!" pursued Mrs. Peckover, looking towards the three drawing-boards, placed together round the pedestal of the cast; "are all those little Mary's doings? She's cleverer, I suppose, by this time, than ever. Ah, Lord, what an old woman I feel, when I think of the many years ago —"

"Come and look at what she has done to-night," interrupted Valentine, taking Mrs. Peckover by the arm, and pressing it significantly as he glanced at where young Thorpe was sitting.

"My drawing—where's my drawing?" repeated Zack. "Who put it away when tea came? Oh, there it is, on the bookcase."

"I congratulate you on remembering that there is such a thing in the world as Madonna's present," said Mrs. Blyth, sarcastically.

Zack looked up bewildered from his tea, and asked what those words meant.

"Oh, never mind," said Mrs. Blyth, "they're not worth explaining. Did you ever hear of a young gentleman who thought more of a plate of muffins than of a lady's gift? I never did. It's too improbable to be true, isn't it? There! don't speak to me; I've a book here that I want to finish. No, it's no use; I shan't say another word."

"What have I done wrong?" asked Zack, looking perplexed as he began to suspect that he had committed some unpardonable mistake earlier in the evening. "I know I burnt a muffin; but what has that to do with Madonna's present to me?" (But Mrs. Blyth shook her head; and, opening her book, became absorbed over it.) "Didn't I thank her properly? I'm sure I meant to." (Here he stopped; but Mrs. Blyth took no notice.) "I suppose I've got into some scrape? Make as much fun as you like; but tell me what it is. You won't? Then I'll find out about it from Madonna. Look here, Mrs. Blyth; I'm not going to get up till she's told me everything." And Zack, with a comic gesture of entreaty, dropped on his knees by Madonna's chair; preventing her from leaving it, which she tried to do, by taking possession of the slate which hung at her side.

While young Thorpe was scribbling questions, protestations, and extravagances on the slate, and while Madonna, half smiling, half tearful, was reading what he wrote, trying hard not to believe in him too easily when he scribbled an explanation, and not to look down on him too leniently when he followed it up by an entreaty; and ending at last, in defiance of Mrs. Blyth's signs to the contrary, in forgiving his carelessness, and letting him take her hand again as usual, in token that she was sincere,—while this little scene was proceeding at one end of the room, a scene of another kind—a dialogue in mysterious whispers—was in full progress between Mr. Blyth and his visitor at the other.

Time had in no respect lessened Valentine's morbid anxiety about the concealment of every circumstance attending Mrs.

Peckover's first connection with Madonna. The years that had passed and left him in undisputed possession of his adopted child had not diminished that caution in keeping secret the little known of her early history, which had even impelled him to pledge Doctor and Mrs. Joyce never to mention particulars of the narrative related at the Rectory. Still, he had not got over his first dread that she might one day be traced, claimed, and taken away, if that narrative, meagre as it was, should ever be trusted to other ears than those which originally listened to it. Still, he kept the hair bracelet and the handkerchief that had belonged to her mother carefully locked up in his bureau; and still, he doubted Mrs. Peckover's discretion in the government of her tongue, as in bygone days when the little girl was first established in his own home.

After making a pretence of showing the drawings begun that evening, Mr. Blyth contrived to lead Mrs. Peckover past them into a recess at the extreme end of the room.

"Well," he said, speaking in an unnecessarily soft whisper, considering the distance which separated him from Zack, "I suppose you're sure of not having let out anything since I last saw you, about how you first met with our darling girl? or about her poor mother? or —?"

"What, you're at it again, sir," interrupted Mrs. Peckover loftily, but dropping her voice. "Dear, dear me! how often must I keep on telling you that I'm old enough to hold my tongue? How much longer are you going to worry about hiding what nobody's seeking?"

"I'm afraid I shall always worry about it," replied Valentine. "Whenever I see you, my good friend, I fancy I hear that melancholy story again about our darling, and that poor forsaken mother of hers, whose name even we don't know. I feel, too, when you come and see us, almost more than at other times, how inexpressibly precious the daughter whom you have given to us is; and I think with dread of the horrible change if anything was incautiously said, and carried from mouth to mouth—about where you met with her mother, for instance, and so forth—that it might lead, nobody knows how, to some claim being laid to her."

"Lord, sir! after all these years, what earthly need have you to be anxious about that?"

"I hope in God you are right," said Valentine, earnestly. "But let us think no more about it," he added, resuming his

usual manner. "I have asked my regular question, that I can't help asking whenever I see you; and you have forgiven me for putting it; and now I am satisfied. I mean to give the students of my drawing academy a holiday for the rest of the night in honour of your arrival. What do you say to devoting the evening to a game at cards?"

"Just what I was thinking I should like myself, as long as it's only sixpence a game, sir," said Mrs. Peckover. "I say, young gentleman," she continued, addressing Zack, after Mr. Blyth had left her to look for the cards, "what nonsense are you writing on our darling's slate, that puts her all in a flutter, and makes her blush up to the eyes, when she's only looking at poor old Peck? Bless her heart! she's as easily amused now as when she was a child. Give us another kiss, my love. You understand what I mean, don't you, though you can't hear? Ah, dear, dear! when she looks at me with her eyes like that she's the living image of —"

"Cribbage," cried Mr. Blyth, knocking a board for three players on the table, and regarding Mrs. Peckover with the most reproachful expression his features could assume.

She felt the look deserved, and approached the card-table confusedly, without another word. But for Valentine's second interruption she would have declared before young Thorpe that "little Mary" was the living image of her mother.

"Madonna's going to play. Will you make the third, Lavvie?" inquired Valentine, shuffling. "It's no use asking Zack; he can't count."

"No, thank you, dear. I shall have enough to do with my book, and trying to keep master Mad-Cap in order while you play," replied Mrs. Blyth.

The game began. It was a custom, whenever Mrs. Peckover came to Mr. Blyth's that cribbage should be played, and that Madonna should take a share in it. This was done, on her part, principally in affectionate remembrance of old times, when she lived under the care of the clown's wife, and when she had learnt cribbage from Mr. Peckover to amuse her, while the accident which had befallen her was still a recent event. It was characteristic of the happy peculiarity of her disposition that the days of suffering, and the after-period of hard tasks in public, with which cards were connected in her case, never seemed to recur to her remembrance painfully in later life. The pleasanter associations which reminded her of homely kindness

that had soothed her pain, and self-denying affection that had consoled her sorrow, were the associations instinctively dwelt on by her heart to the exclusion of others.

To Mrs. Blyth's astonishment, Zack, for full ten minutes, required no keeping in order while the rest were playing. It was marvellous, but there he was, standing quietly by the fireplace with the drawing in his hand, actually thinking! Mrs. Blyth's amazement at this so overcame her that she laid down her book to look at him. He noticed the action, and approached.

"That's right," he said; "don't read any more. I want a serious consultation with you."

First a visit from Mrs. Peckover, then a serious consultation with Zack. A night of wonders!—thought Mrs. Blyth.

"I've made it right with Madonna," Zack continued. "She don't think the worse of me because I went on like a fool about the muffins. But that's not what I want to talk about now: it's a sort of a secret. In the first place —"

"Do you usually mention secrets in a voice that everybody can hear?" asked Mrs. Blyth, laughing.

"Oh, never mind that," he replied, not lowering his tone in the least; "it's only a secret from Madonna, and we can talk before her, poor little soul, as if she wasn't in the room. Now! this is the thing: she's made me a present, and I ought to show my gratitude by making her another in return. He resumed his ordinary manner as he warmed with the subject, and began to walk up and down the room in his flighty way. I have been thinking what the present ought to be—something pretty. I can't do her a drawing worth a farthing; and if I could—"

"Suppose you come here and sit down," interposed Mrs. Blyth. "While you are wandering backwards and forwards in that way, you take Madonna's attention off the game.

No doubt he did. How could she see him walking close by her, and carrying her drawing wherever he went—as if he prized it too much to put it down—without feeling gratified in the innocent little vanities of her sex, without looking after him too often to be properly alive to the interests of her game.

Zack took Mrs. Blyth's advice, and sat by her, with his back towards the cribbage players.

"Well, the question is, What present am I to give?" he went on. "I've been turning it over in my mind, and the long and the short is —"

"Fifteen two, fifteen four, and a pair's six," said Valentine, reckoning up the tricks in his hand.

"Did you ever notice that she has a particularly pretty hand and arm?" proceeded Zack, evasively. "I'm rather a judge of these things myself; and of all the other girls I ever saw—"

"Never mind other girls," said Mrs. Blyth. "Tell me what you mean to give Madonna."

"Two for his heels," cried Mrs. Peckover, turning up a knave with glee.

"I mean to give her a bracelet," said Zack.

Valentine looked up from the card table.

"Play, please sir," said Mrs. Peckover; "little Mary's waiting."

"Well, Zack," rejoined Mrs. Blyth; "your idea only errs on the side of generosity. I should recommend something less costly. It's one of Madonna's oddities not to care about jewelry? She might have bought herself a bracelet long ago, out of her savings, if trinkets had been things to tempt her."

"Wait a bit," said Zack, "you haven't heard the best of my notion yet: the pith of it has to come. The bracelet I mean to give her she will prize to the day of her death, or she's not the girl I take her for. What do you think of a bracelet that reminds her of you and Valentine, and jolly old Peck there—and a little of me, too, which I hope won't make her think the worse of it. I've got a design against all your heads," he continued, imitating a pair of scissors with two fingers, and raising his voice in triumph. "It's a splendid idea: I mean to give Madonna a Hair Bracelet!"

Mrs. Peckover and Mr. Blyth started in their chairs, and stared at each other as amazedly as if Zack's words had struck them both at the same moment with a smart electrical shock.

"Of all things in the world, how came he ever to think of giving her that!" ejaculated Mrs. Peckover under her breath; her memory reverting to the mournful day when strangers had searched the body of Madonna's mother, and had found the Hair Bracelet hidden in a corner of the dead woman's pocket.

"Hush! let's go on with the game," said Valentine. He, too, was thinking of the Hair Bracelet—thinking of it as it now lay locked up in his bureau, remembering how he would have destroyed it years ago, but that his conscience forbade him; pondering on the fatal discoveries to which, by bare possibility, it might yet lead if it should fall into strangers' hands.

"A Hair Bracelet," continued Zack, unconscious of the effect he was producing on two of the card-players; "and such hair, too, as I mean it to be made of!—Why, Madonna will think it more precious than all the diamonds in the world. I defy anybody to have hit on a better idea of the sort of present she's sure to like; it's elegant and appropriate— isn't it?"

"Oh, yes! very nice indeed," replied Mrs. Blyth, confusedly. She knew as much of Madonna's history as her husband did; and was wondering what he would think of the present which young Thorpe proposed giving to their adopted child.

"The thing I want to know," said Zack, "is what you think the best pattern. There will be two kinds of hair, which can be made into any shape—your hair and Mrs. Peckover's."

"Not a morsel of my hair shall go towards the bracelet!" muttered Mrs. Peckover, who was listening.

"The difficult hair to bring in, will be mine and Valentine's," pursued Zack. "Mine's long enough, to be sure; I ought to have got it cut a month ago; but it's so stiff and curly; and Blyth keeps his cropped so short—I don't see what they can do with it, unless they make rings or stars, or something stumpy, in the way of a cross pattern, of it."

"The people at the shop will know best," said Mrs. Blyth, resolving to proceed cautiously.

"One thing I'm determined on," cried Zack—"the clasp. The clasp shall be a serpent, with turquoise eyes, and a carbuncle tail; and our initials scored on his scales. I should like to surprise Madonna with it this very evening."

"You shall never give it to her, if I can help it," grumbled Mrs. Peckover, soliquising under her breath. "If anything can bring her ill-luck, it will be a Hair Bracelet!"

These words were spoken with perfect seriousness; for they were the result of strong superstitious conviction.

From the time when the Hair Bracelet was found on Madonna's mother, Mrs. Peckover had persuaded herself—not unnaturally, in the absence of information to the contrary—that it had been in some way connected with the ruin and shame which had driven its possessor forth as an outcast, to die amongst strangers. To believe, in consequence, that a Hair Bracelet had brought "ill-luck" to the child, was a perfectly direct and inevitable deductive process to Mrs. Peckover's mind. The motives which had formerly influenced her to forbid "little Mary" ever to begin anything important on a Friday, or to im-

peril her prosperity by walking under a ladder, were precisely the motives by which she was now actuated in determining to prevent the presentation of young Thorpe's gift.

Although Valentine only caught a word here and there, to guide him to the subject of Mrs. Peckover's mutterings to herself while the game was going on, he guessed easily enough the tenour of her thoughts, and suspected that she would, ere long, talk louder than was desirable if Zack proceeded further with his present topic. Accordingly, he took advantage of a pause in the game, and of a relapse into another fit of walking about the room on young Thorpe's part, to approach his wife's couch, as if he wanted to find something, and to whisper to her, "Stop his talking about that present to Madonna; I'll tell you why another time."

Mrs. Blyth easily complied with this injunction, by telling Zack, with perfect truth, that she had been already so excited by the events of the evening; and that she must put off further talking till the next night, when she promised to advise to the best of her power. He was, however, too full of his subject to relinquish it easily under no stronger influence than a polite hint. Having lost one listener in Mrs. Blyth, he tried the experiment of inviting two others to replace her, by addressing himself to the players.

"I dare say you heard what I have been talking about to Mrs. Blyth?" he began.

"Lord, Master Zack!" said Mrs. Peckover, "do you think we haven't had something else to do, besides listening to you? Don't talk, please, till we are done, or you'll throw us out. Don't, on any account, we are playing for money—sixpence a game."

Repelled on both sides; Zack was obliged to give way. He walked off to try and amuse himself at the book-case. Mrs. Peckover, triumphant, nodded and winked several times at Valentine across the table; desiring, by these signs, to show that she could not only be silent herself when the conversation was in danger of approaching a forbidden subject, but could make other people hold their tongues too.

The room was now quiet, and the game proceeded smoothly enough, but not so pleasantly as usual. Valentine did not regain his good spirits; and Mrs. Peckover relapsed into whispering discontentedly to herself—now and then looking towards the book-case, where young Thorpe was sitting sleepily, with

a volume on his knee. It was a relief to everybody when supper came, and the cards were put away.

Zack, becoming lively again at the prospect of a little eating and drinking, tried to return to the dangerous subject; addressing himself on this occasion, to Valentine. He was interrupted, however, before he had spoken three words. Mr. Blyth suddenly remembered that he had an important communication to make to young Thorpe.

"Excuse me, Zack," he said, "I have some news which Mrs. Peckover's arrival drove out of my head; and which I must mention while I have the opportunity. Both my pictures are done—what do you think of that?—and in their frames. The classical landscape is to be called 'The Golden Age,' a poetical sort of name; and the figure-subject is to be 'Columbus in sight of the New World;' which is, I think, simple and grand. Wait a minute! the best has yet to come. I am going to exhibit both pictures in the studio to friends, and friends' friends, as early as Saturday next."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Jack. "Why, it's only January; and you always used to have your private view in April, just before they were sent into the Academy."

"Quite right," interposed Valentine, "but I am going to make a change this year. The cards of invitation are coming from the printer's to-morrow morning. I shall reserve a packet for you and your friends."

The clock struck the half-hour after ten. Having private reasons for continuing to preserve the appearance of obedience to his father's domestic regulations, Zack rose to say good night, in order to insure being home before the house-door was bolted at eleven. This time he did not forget Madonna's drawing; but showed such unusual carefulness in tying his pocket-handkerchief over the frame to preserve it from injury that she could not help—in the innocence of her heart—betraying to him both by look and manner, how warmly she appreciated his anxiety for the preservation of her gift. Never had the bright young face been lovelier in its artless happiness than it appeared when she was shaking hands with Zack.

Just as Valentine was about to follow his guest out of the room, Mrs. Blyth called him back, reminding him that he had a cold, and begging him not to expose himself to the wintry air by going to the door.

"But the servants must be going to bed; and somebody ought to fasten the bolts," remonstrated Mr. Blyth.

"I'll go, sir," said Mrs. Peckover, rising with alacrity. "I'll see Master Zack out. Bless your heart! it's no trouble. I'm always moving about from morning to night, to prevent myself getting fatter. Don't say no, Mr. Blyth, unless you are afraid of trusting an old gossip like me alone with your visitors."

The last words were intended as a sarcasm, and were whispered into Valentine's ear. He understood the allusion to their private conversation; and felt that unless he let her have her own way he might risk offending an old friend by implying a mistrust of her, ridiculous under the circumstances. So, when his wife nodded to him to take advantage of the offer, he accepted it.

"Now, I'll stop his giving Mary a Hair Bracelet!" thought Mrs. Peckover, as she bustled after young Thorpe.

"Wait a bit, young gentleman," she said, arresting his progress on the landing. "Leave off talking a minute, and let me speak. Do you really mean to give Mary that Hair Bracelet?"

"Oho! then you did hear after all?" said Jack. "Mean? Of course I mean!"

"And you want to put some of my hair in it?"

"To be sure I do! Madonna wouldn't like it without."

"Then you had better make up your mind at once to give her some other present; for not one morsel of my hair shall you have. There now! what do you think of that?"

"I don't believe it, my old darling. Why not?"

"Never mind why. I've got my own reasons."

"Very well: I've got my reasons for giving the bracelet; and I mean to give it. If you won't let your hair be plaited up with the rest, it's Madonna you will disappoint."

Mrs. Peckover says that she must change her tactics.

"Don't you be so obstinate, Master Zack, and I'll tell you the reason," she said in an altered tone, leading the way lower down into the passage. "I don't want you to give her a Hair Bracelet, because I believe it will bring ill-luck—there!"

Zack burst out laughing. "Do you call that a reason? Who ever heard of a Hair Bracelet being an unlucky gift?"

At this moment the door of Mrs. Blyth's room opened.

"All quite right, sir," said Mrs. Peckover; adding in a whisper to Zack;—"Hush! don't say a word!"

"Don't let him keep you with his nonsense," said Valentine.

"My nonsense!" began Zack, indignantly.

"He's going, sir," interrupted Mrs. Peckover. "I shall be upstairs in a moment." The door of the room closed again.

"What are you driving at?" said Zack, in bewilderment.

"Give her some other present," said Mrs. Peckover, in persuasive tones. "You may think it a whim of mine, if you like—I'm an old fool; but don't give her a Hair Bracelet."

"A whim of yours!!!" repeated Zack, with a look which made Mrs. Peckover's cheeks redden with indignation. "What! a woman at your time of life subject to whims! My darling Peckover, it won't do. My mind's made up. Nothing in the world can stop me—except, of course, Madonna's having a Hair Bracelet already, which I know she hasn't."

"You know that, do you, you mischievous imp? Then, you know wrong!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, losing her temper.

"You don't say so? How very remarkable, to think of her having a Hair Bracelet already, and my not knowing it!—Mrs. Peckover," continued Zack, mimicking his clerical enemy, the Reverend Aaron Yollop, "what I am now about to say grieves me deeply; but I have a solemn duty, and in the conscientious performance of that duty, I now unhesitatingly express my conviction that the remark you have just made is—a flam."

"It isn't—Monkey!" returned Mrs. Peckover, her anger boiling over, as she nodded her head vehemently in Zack's face.

Just then Valentine's step became audible in the room above; first moving towards the door, then retreating from it, as if he had been called back. "I hav'n't let out what I oughtn't, have I?" thought Mrs. Peckover; calming down when she heard the movement upstairs.

"Oh, you stick to it, do you?" continued Zack. "It's odd that Mrs. Blyth should have said nothing about this Hair Bracelet of yours while I was talking to her. But she doesn't know, of course: and Valentine doesn't know either, I suppose? By Jove! he's not gone to bed yet: I'll run back and ask if Madonna really has got a Hair Bracelet."

"For God's sake don't!—don't say a word about it, or you'll get me into trouble!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, turning pale as she thought of possible consequences, and catching young Thorpe by the arm when he tried to pass.

The step up stairs crossed the room again.

"Well, cried Zack, "of all the extraordinary women!—"

"Hush! he's going to open the door."

"Never mind; I won't say anything," whispered young Thorpe, good nature prompting him to relieve Mrs. Peckover's distress, the moment he became convinced it was genuine.

"That's a good chap! that a dear good chap!" exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, squeezing Jack's hand in a fervour of gratitude.

The door of Mrs. Blyth's room opened for the second time.

"He's gone, sir; he's gone at last!" cried Mrs. Peckover, shutting the house door on the parting guest with inhospitable rapidity, and locking it with elaborate care.

"I must make it safe with master Zack to-morrow; though I don't believe I have said a word I oughtn't to say," thought she, ascending the stairs. "But Mr. Blyth works himself into such fidgets about the poor thing being traced and taken from him that he would go distracted if he knew what I said just now to Master Zack. Not that it's so much what I said to him, as what he made out somehow and said to me. But they're so sharp, these young chaps—so awful sharp!"

Here she stopped on the landing to recover her breath; then whispered to herself, as she approached Mr. Blyth's door: "But one thing I'm determined on; little Mary shan't have that Hair Bracelet!"

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Even as Mrs. Peckover walked thinking all the way up-stairs, so did Zack walk wondering all the way home.

What the deuce could these extraordinary remonstrances about his present to Madonna mean. Was it not clear from Mrs. Peckover's terror when he talked of asking Blyth whether Madonna really had a Hair Bracelet, that she had told the truth? And was it not even plainer still that she had let out a secret in telling that truth, which Blyth must have ordered her to keep? Why keep it? Was this mysterious Hair Bracelet mixed up with the secret about Madonna's past, which Valentine had always kept from everybody? Very likely it was—why cudgel his brains about what didn't concern him? Was it not—considering the fact, previously forgotten, that he had but fifteen shillings and threepence in the world—rather lucky that Mrs. Peckover had taken it into her head to stop him from buying what he hadn't the means of paying for. What other present could he buy for Madonna? Would she like a thimble? or a pair of cuffs? or a pot of bear's grease?

Here Zack suddenly paused in his mental interrogatories; for he had arrived within sight of his home.

A change passed over his handsome face: he frowned as he looked up at the light in his father's window.

"I'll slip out again to-night," he muttered. "The more I'm bullied at home, the oftener I'll go out on the sly."

This rebellious speech was occasioned by the recollection of a domestic scene, which had contributed, early that evening, to swell the list of the Tribulations of Zack. Mr. Thorpe had moral objections to Mr. Blyth's profession, and moral doubts on the subject of Mr. Blyth himself—these last being strengthened by that gentleman's refusal to explain away the mystery which enveloped his adopted child. As a consequence, Mr. Thorpe considered the painter no fit companion for a devout young man; and expressed, severely, his surprise at finding that his son had accepted an invitation from a person of doubtful character. Zack's rejoinder to his father's reproof was decisive, if nothing else. He denied everything alleged against his friend's reputation—lost his temper on being rebuked for "indecent vehemence" of language—and left the paternal tea-table in defiance, to cultivate the Fine Arts in the doubtful company of Valentine Blyth.

"Just in time, sir," said the page, grinning as he opened the door. "It's on the stroke of eleven."

Zack muttered something savage in reply, which it is not advisable to report. The servant secured the lock, while he put his hat on the hall table, and lit his bedroom candle.

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A little past midnight the door opened again softly, and Zack appeared on the step, equipped for his nocturnal expedition.

He hesitated, as he put the key into the lock from outside, before he closed the door behind him. He had never done this on former occasions; he could not tell why he did it now. We are mysteries even to ourselves; and there are times when the Voices of the future that are in us, yet not ours, speak, and make the earthly part of us conscious of their presence. Oftenest our mortal sense feels that they are breaking their dread silence at those supreme moments of existence, when on the choice between two apparently trifling alternatives hangs suspended the future of a life. And thus it was now with the young man who stood on the threshold of his home, doubtful whether he

should pursue or abandon the purpose uppermost in his mind. On his choice between the alternatives of going on, or going back—which the closing of a door would decide—depended the future of his life, and of other lives mingled with it.

He waited a minute undecided, for the warning Voices within him were stronger than his own will: he waited, looking up thoughtfully at the starry loveliness of the winter's night—then closed the door behind him softly—hesitated at the last step—and then set forth from home, walking at a rapid pace.

He was not in his usual spirits. He felt no inclination to sing as was his wont, while passing through the fresh, frosty air: and he wondered why.

The Voices were still speaking faintly and more faintly within him. But we must die before we can become immortal as they are; and their language to us in this life is often as an unknown tongue.

BOOK II.

THE SEEKING.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WITH THE BLACK SKULL CAP.

It was two o'clock in the morning; and the entertainments in the Snuggery were fast rising to the climax of joviality. A favourite comic song had just been sung by a bloated old man with a bald head and a hairy chin. There was a brief lull of repose, before the amusements resumed their noisy progress. Orders for drink were flying in all directions. Friends were talking at the top of their voices, and strangers were staring at each other—except at the lower end of the room, where the attention of the company was concentrated strangely upon one man.

The person who thus attracted the curiosity of all his neighbours had come in late, had taken the first vacant place he could find near the door, and had sat there listening and looking about. He drank and smoked like the rest; but never applauded, never laughed, never exhibited the slightest symptom of astonishment, or pleasure, or impatience, or disgust—though it was evident, from his manner of entering and giving his orders, that he visited the Snuggery that night for the first time.

He was not in mourning, for there was no band round his hat; but he was dressed nevertheless in a black frock-coat, waist-coat, and trousers, and wore black kid gloves. He seemed little at his ease in this costume, moving his limbs, whenever he changed his position, as cautiously as if he had been clothed in gossamer instead of stout black broadcloth, shining with its first new gloss. His face was tanned to a Moorish brown, was scarred by the marks of old wounds, and overgrown by iron-grey whiskers, which met under his chin. His eyes were light and large, and seemed to be always vigilantly on the watch. Indeed

the expression of his face, coarse and heavy as it was, was remarkable for acuteness, for cool, collected penetration, for its habitually-observant, passively-watchful look.

But it was not his face, his dress, or his manner, that drew the attention of his neighbours; it was his head. Under his hat (which was brand-new, like everything else he wore), there appeared, fitting tightly round his temples and behind his ears, a black velvet skull-cap. Not a vestige of hair peeped from under. All round his head, as far as could be seen beneath his hat, which he wore far back over his coat-collar, was nothing but bare flesh, encircled by a rim of black velvet.

Quietly as the strange man in black had taken his seat in the Snuggery, he and his skull-cap attracted general attention.

Nobody paused to reflect that he probably wore his black velvet head-dress from necessity: nobody gave him credit for having objections to a wig, which might be perfectly well founded; and nobody was liberal enough to consider that he had as much right to put on a skull-cap under his hat, if he chose, as any other man had to put on a shirt under his waistcoat. The audience saw nothing but the novelty in the way of a head-dress which the stranger wore, and they resented it, because it was a novelty. First they expressed resentment by staring indignantly, then by laughing, then by making sarcastic remarks. He bore their ridicule with the most provoking coolness. He did not expostulate, or look angry, or fidget in his seat, or get up to go. He sat smoking as quietly as ever, not taking the slightest notice of any of the dozens of people who were all taking notice of him.

His unassailable composure only served to encourage his neighbours to take further liberties. One rickety little man, with a spirituous nose and watery eyes, urged on by some women, advanced to the stranger, and, expressing his admiration of a skull-cap as a becoming ornamental addition to a hat, announced his anxiety to feel the quality of the velvet. He stretched out his hand, not a word of warning or expostulation being uttered by the victim of the intended insult; but the moment his fingers touched the skull-cap, the strange man, still without speaking, without even removing his cigar from his mouth, deliberately threw all that remained of the hot brandy and water before him in the rickety gentleman's face.

With a scream of pain as the hot liquor flew into his eyes the little man struck out helplessly with his fists, and fell between

the benches. A friend advanced to avenge his injuries, and was thrown sprawling on the floor. Yells of "Turn him out!" followed; people at the other end of the room jumped up on their seats; women screamed, men shouted, glasses were broken, sticks were waved, and, in one instant, the stranger was assailed by every one of his neighbours who could get near.

Just as it seemed certain that he must yield to numbers, in spite of his gallant resistance, and be hurled out of the door, a tall young gentleman leapt up on one of the benches at the opposite side of the gangway running down the middle of the room, and apostrophised the company around him with vehement gesticulation. Alas for parents with pleasure-loving sons!—alas for Mr. Valentine Blyth's idea of teaching his pupils to be steady, by teaching him to draw!—this furious young gentleman was Mr. Zachary Thorpe, junior, of Baregrove Square.

"Damn you, you cowardly scoundrels!" roared Zack, his eyes aflame with valour, generosity, and gin-and-water. "What do you mean by setting on one man in that way? Hit out, sir—hit out! I'm coming to help you!"

With these words Zack tucked up his cuffs, and jumped into the crowd. His height, strength, and science as a boxer carried him triumphantly to the opposite bench. Two or three blows on the ribs, and one on the nose which drew blood, only served to increase the pugilistic ferocity of his expression. In a minute he was by the side of the man with the skull-cap; and the two were fighting back to back, amid roars of applause from the audience at the upper end of the room, who were only spectators of the disturbance.

Meantime the police had been summoned. But the waiters, in their anxiety to see a struggle between two men on one side, and two dozen on the other, had neglected to close the street door. The consequence was, that all the cabmen on the stand outside, and all the vagabond night-idlers in the vagabond neighbourhood of the Snuggery, poured into the narrow passage, and got up an impromptu riot of their own with the waiters, who tried, too late, to turn them out. Just as the policemen were forcing their way through the throng below, Zack and the stranger had fought their way out of the throng above, and had got clear of the room.

On the right of the landing was a door, through which the man with the skull-cap darted, dragging Zack after him. His temper was as cool, his eye as vigilant as ever. The key of

the door was inside. He locked it, amid applauding laughter from the people on the staircase, mixed with cries of "Stop 'em in the Court!" from the waiters. The two then descended a flight of stairs at headlong speed, and found themselves in a kitchen, confronting an astonished man cook and two female servants. Zack knocked the man down before he could use the rolling-pin which he had snatched up; while the stranger took a hat that stood on the dresser, and jammed it with one smack of his large hand on young Thorpe's bare head. The next moment they were out in a court into which the kitchen opened, running at the top of their speed.

The police had to get out of the crowd in the passage and go round the front of the house, before they could arrive at the turning which led into the court from the street. This gave the fugitives a start; and the neighbourhood of alleys and by-streets in which their flight involved them, was the neighbourhood of all others to favour escape. While the cries of "Stop thief!" were rending the night air in one direction, Zack and the stranger were walking quietly, arm in arm, in the other.

The man with the skull-cap had taken the lead; though, from the manner in which he stared about him, and involved himself and his companion in blind alleys, it was clear that he was quite unfamiliar with the part of the town through which they were walking. Zack, having treated himself that night to his fatal third glass, and having finished half of it before the fight began, was by this time in no condition to care about following any particular path in the labyrinth of London. He walked on, talking incessantly to the stranger, who never answered him. It was of no use to criticise his style of fighting, which was anything but scientific; to express astonishment at his skill in knocking his hat on again, all through the struggle, every time it was knocked off; and to declare admiration of his quickness in taking the cook's hat to cover his companion's bare head, which might have exposed him to suspicion as he passed through the streets. The imperturbable hero, who had not uttered a word all through the fight, was as imperturbable as ever, and would not utter a word after it.

They walked to the foot of Ludgate Hill. Here the stranger stopped—glanced towards the open space, where the river ran—gave a gasp of relief—and made for Blackfriars Bridge. He led Zack, still thick in his utterance, and unsteady on his legs, to the parapet wall; and, looking steadily in his face by the

light of the gas-lamp, addressed him, for the first time, in a grave, deliberate voice:

"Now then, young 'un, pull a breath, and wipe that bloody nose of yours."

Zack, instead of resenting this unceremonious manner of speaking—which he might have done had he been sober—burst into frantic laughter. The gravity and composure of the stranger's tone and manner, contrasted with the oddity of the proposition by which he opened the conversation, would have been ludicrous even to a man whose faculties were not intoxicated.

While Zack was laughing till the tears rolled down his cheeks, his odd companion was leaning over the parapet, and pulling off his gloves, which had suffered considerably during the fight. Having rolled them up into a ball, he jerked them contemptuously into the river.

"There goes the first gloves as ever I had on, and the last as ever I mean to wear," he said, spreading out his brawny hands.

Young Thorpe heaved a few expiring gasps of laughter; then became quiet from sheer exhaustion.

"Go it again," said the man of the skull-cap, staring at him gravely, "I like to hear you."

"I can't," answered Zack faintly; "I'm out of breath. I say, old boy, you're a character! Who are you?"

"Nobody in particular; and I don't know as I've got a friend to care about who I am, in all England," replied the other. "Give us your hand! In the parts I come from, when one man stands by another, as you stood by me, them two are brothers afterwards. You needn't be a brother to me, if you don't like. I mean to be a brother to you, whether you like it or not. My name's Mat. What's yours?"

"Zack," returned young Thorpe, clapping his new acquaintance on the back with brotherly familiarity. "I like your way of talking. Where do you come from, Mat? And what do you wear that queer cap under your hat for?"

"I come from America," replied Mat, grave and deliberate as ever. "And I wear this cap because I haven't got no scalp."

"What do you mean?" cried Zack, startled into temporary sobriety, and taking his hand off his friend's shoulder as quickly as if he had put it on a red-hot iron.

"What I say," continued Mat. "Me and my scalp parted

company years ago. I'm here, on a bridge in London, talking to a young chap of the name of Zack. My scalp's on the top of a high pole in some Indian village, anywhere you like about the Amazon country. If there's any puffs of wind going there, like there is here, it's rattling just now, like a bit of dry parchment; and all my hair's flip-flapping about like a horse's tail, when the flies is in season. I know nothing more about my scalp, or my hair than that. If you don't believe me, lay hold of my hat, and I'll show you—"

"No, thank you!" exclaimed Zack, recoiling from the offered hat. "I don't want to see it. How the deuce do you manage without a scalp? How is it you're not dead? eh?"

"It takes more to kill a tough man than you think," said Mat. "I was found before my head got cool, and plastered with leaves and ointment. They'd left a bit of scalp at the back, being in too great a hurry to do their work; and a new skin grew over after a little—a babyish sort of a skin, that wouldn't bear no new crop of hair. So I had to keep my head comfortable with an old yellow handkerchief; which I wore till I got to San Francisco, on my way back here. I met with a priest at San Francisco, who told me that I should look less like a savage if I wore a skull-cap like his instead of a handkercher, when I got back into what he called a civilised world. So I bought this cap. I suppose it looks better than my old handkercher; but it ain't half so comfortable."

"But how did you lose your scalp?" asked Zack. "Upon my life, you're the most interesting fellow I ever met! Let's walk about, while we talk. I feel steadier on my legs now; and it's infernally cold standing here."

"Which way can we soonest get out of this muck of houses?" asked Mat, surveying the view around him with grim disgust. "There ain't no room, even on this bridge, for the wind to blow fairly over a man. I'd as soon be smothered up in a bed, as smothered up in smoke and stink here."

"What a delightful fellow you are! so entirely out of the common! Steady, my friend. The grog's not quite out of my head; and I've got the hiccups. Here's my way home, and your way into the fresh air, if you really want it. Come along; tell me how you lost your scalp."

"There ain't nothing particular to tell. What's your name again?"

"Zack."

"Well, Zack, I was out on the tramp, on the banks of the Amazon—"

"Amazon? what's that? a woman? or a place?"

"Did you ever hear of South America?"

"I can't swear to it; but, to the best of my belief, I have."

"Well; the Amazon's a longish river in those parts. I was out, as I told you, on the tramp."

"So I should think! you look the sort of man who has tramped everywhere."

"You're about right there! I've driven cattle in Mexico; I've been out with a gang that went to find an overland road to the North Pole; I've worked catching wild horses on the Pampas; and digging gold in California. I went away from England, a tidy lad aboard ship; and I am back again now, an old vagabond as hasn't a friend. If you want to know who I am, and what I've been up to all my life, that's about as much as I can tell you."

"You don't say so! Wait a minute, though; there's one thing—you're not troubled with the hiccups, are you, after eating supper? (I've been a martyr to hiccups ever since I was a child.) But, there's one thing you haven't told me; you haven't told me what your other name is besides Mat. Mine's Thorpe."

"I haven't heard the sound of the other name for better than twenty years: and I don't care if I never hear it again." His voice sank huskily, and he turned his head away as he said those words. "They nicknamed me 'Marksman,' when I used to go with the exploring gangs, because I was the best shot. You call me Marksman, if you don't like Mat. Mister Mathew Marksman: everybody seems a 'Mister' here. I don't mean to call you 'Mister' for all that. I shall stick to Zack; there's no bother about it."

"All right! and I'll stick to Mat, which is shorter. But you haven't told the story about how you lost your scalp."

"There's no story in it. Do you know what it is to have a man dodging after you through these streets here? I dare say you do. Well, I had three skulking Indians dodging after me, over better than four hundred miles of lonesome country, where I might have bawled for help for a whole week, and never made anybody hear. They wanted my scalp, and they wanted my rifle, and they got both at last, because I couldn't get any sleep."

"Not get any sleep. Why?"

"Because they was three, and I was only one. One kep'

watch while the other two slept. I hadn't nobody to keep watch; and my life depended on my eyes being open night and day. I took a dog's snooze once, and was woke by an arrow in my face. I kep' on a long time after that, before I give out; but at last I got the horrors, and thought the prairie was a-fire, and run from it. I don't know how long I run on in that mad state; I only know that the horrors turned out to be the saving of my life. I missed my trail, and struck another, which was a trail of friendly Indians—people I'd traded with. And I came up with 'em somehow, near enough for the stragglers of their party to hear me shriek when my scalp was took. Now you know as much as I do, except that I woke up in an Indian wigwam, with a crop of cool leaves on my head, instead of hair.

"A crop of leaves! What a jolly old Jack-in-the-Green you must have looked! Which of those scars on your face is the arrow-wound, eh? I say, old boy, you've got a black eye! Did any of those fellows hurt you?"

"Hurt me? Chaps like them hurt me!!" Tickled by the extravagance of the idea which Zack's question suggested Mat indulged himself in a gruff chuckle, which seemed to claim some sort of relationship with a laugh.

"Ah! of course they haven't;—I didn't think they had," said Zack, whose pugilistic sympathies were deeply touched by the contempt with which his friend treated the bruises received in the fight. "Go on, Mat, I like adventures of your sort. What did you do after your head healed up?"

"Well, I got tired of dodging about the Amazon, and went south, and learnt to throw a lasso, and took a turn at the wild horses. Galloping did my head good."

"It's what would do my head good too. Yours is the life for me! How did you come to lead it? Did you run away from home?"

"No. I served aboard ship, being too idle to be kep' at home. I always wanted to run wild somewheres; but I didn't really go to do it, till I picked up a letter waiting for me at the Brazils. There was news in that which sickened me of going home again; so I deserted, and went on the tramp. And I've been mostly on the tramp ever since, till I got here last Sunday."

"What! have you only been in England since Sunday?"

"That's all. I made a good time of it in California, where I've been digging gold. My mate got a talking about the old country, and wrought on me so that I went back with him to see

it again. So, instead of gambling away my money over there" (Mat jerked his hand in a westerly direction), "I've come to spend it here; and I'm going into the country to-morrow, to see if anybody lives to own me at the old place."

"And suppose nobody does? What then?"

"Then I shall go back. After twenty years among savages, or little better, I'm not fit for the sort of thing as goes on here. I can't sleep in a bed; I can't stop in a room; I can't be comfortable in decent clothes; I can't stray into a singing shop without a dust being kicked up, because I haven't got a proper head of hair. I can't shake up along with the rest of you, nohow; I'm used to hard lines and a wild country; and I shall go back and die among the lonesome places where there's plenty of room for me." And again Mat jerked his hand in the direction of the American continent.

"Don't talk about going back!" cried Zack; "you're sure to find somebody left at home—don't you think so yourself?"

Mat made no answer. He suddenly slackened; then, as suddenly, increased his pace; dragging young Thorpe with him at a headlong rate.

"You're sure to find somebody," continued Zack, in his off-hand way. "I don't know—gently! we're not walking for a wager—I don't know whether you're married or not?" (Mat, still made no answer, and walked faster than ever.) "But if you haven't got wife or child, every fellow's got a father and mother; and most fellows have got brothers or sisters—"

"Good night," said Mat, abruptly holding out his hand.

"Why! what's the matter?" asked Zack, in astonishment. "Do you want to part company already? We are not near the end of the streets yet. Have I said anything that offended you?"

"No. Come and talk to me, if you like, the day after to-morrow. I shall be back then, whatever happens. I said I'd be like a brother to you; and that means, doing anything you ask. Come and smoke a pipe with me as soon as I'm back. Do you know Kirk Street. It's nigh on the Market. Do you know a 'bacco shop in Kirk Street? It's got a green door, and Fourteen written on it in yaller paint. When I am shut up in a room of my own, which isn't often, I'm shut up there. I can't give you the key of the house, because I want it myself."

"Kirk Street? That's my way. Can't we go on together? What do you want to say good-night here for?"

"Because I want to be left by myself. It's not your fault; but you've set me thinking of something that don't make me easy in my mind. I've had a lonesome life, young 'un; straying away months and months in the wilderness, without a human being to speak to. I dare say that wasn't a right sort of a life for a man to take up with; but I did take up with it; and I can't get over liking it still. When I'm not easy in my mind, I want to be left lonesome as I used to be. I want it now. Good night."

Before Zack could enter his new friend's address in his pocket-book, Mat had crossed the road, and disappeared in the dark distance dotted with gaslights. In another moment, the last thump of his steady footsteps died away in the morning stillness.

"That's an odd fellow"—thought Zack as he pursued his own road—"and we have got acquainted in an odd way. I shall go and see him though, on Thursday; something may come of it, one day."

CHAPTER II.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

When Zack reached Baregrove Square, it was four in the morning.

Immediately after parting with Mat, Fate so ordained it that he passed one of those late—or, to speak correctly, early—public-houses, which are open to customers during the "small hours" of the morning. He was parched with thirst; and the hiccuping fit which had seized him in the company of his new friend had not subsided. "Suppose I try what a drop of brandy will do," thought Zack, stopping at the public-house.

He went in easily enough—but he came out with difficulty. However, he had achieved his purpose of curing the hiccups. The remedy employed acted, to be sure, on his legs as well as his stomach—but that was a trifling eccentricity unworthy of notice.

He was too exclusively occupied in chuckling over the remembrance of the riotous train of circumstances which had brought his new acquaintance and himself together, to notice his own personal condition, or observe that his course over the patient was of a sinuous nature. It was only when he pulled

the door-key out, and tried to put it into the key-hole, that his attention was directed to himself; and then he discovered that his hands were helpless, and that he was by no means steady on his legs.

He was now conscious that his visit to the public-house had by no means tended to sober him; and awake to the importance of noiselessly stealing up to bed—but totally unable to put the key into the door at the first attempt, or to look comfortably for the key-hole, without previously leaning against the area railings at his side.

"Steady," muttered Zack, "I'm done for if I make any noise." Here he felt for the keyhole, and guided the key elaborately, with his left hand, into its proper place. He next opened the door, so quietly that he was astonished—entered the passage with marvellous stealthiness—then closed the door again, and cried "Hush!" when he found that he had let the lock go too noisily.

He listened before he attempted to light his candle. The dark stillness was instinct with an awful repose; and deepened ominously by the solemn tick-tick of the kitchen clock—never audible from the passage in the day time: terribly distinct at this moment.

"I won't bolt the door," he whispered, "till I have struck a —" Here the unreliability of brandy as a curative agent in cases of fermentation in the stomach, was demonstrated by a sudden return of the hiccuping. "Hush!" cried Zack for the second time; terrified at the relapse, and clapping his hand to his mouth when too late.

After groping, on his knees, with extraordinary perseverance all round the rim of his bed-room candlestick, which stood on one of the hall chairs, he succeeded—not in finding the box of matches—but in knocking it off the chair, and sending it rolling over the stone floor. With difficulty he captured it, and struck a light. Never, in all Zack's experience, had matches caught flame with such a report, as was produced from the one disastrous match which he happened to select to light his candle with.

The next thing was to bolt the door. He succeeded with the bolt at the top, but failed signally with the bolt at the bottom, which appeared difficult to deal with that night. It creaked fiercely on being moved—stuck spitefully just at the entrance of the staple—slipped all of a sudden, under pressure,

and ran like lightning into its place, with a bang. "If that doesn't bring my father down"—thought Zack, listening, and stifling the hiccups with all his might—"he's a harder sleeper than I take him for."

But no sound of any kind broke the stillness of the bedroom regions. Zack sat on the stairs, and took his boots off, got up again with difficulty, listened, took his candlestick, listened once more, whispered "Now for it!" and began the perilous ascent.

He held tight by the banisters, only falling against them, and making them crack from top to bottom once, before he reached the drawing-room landing. He ascended the second flight of stairs without casualties, until he got to the top, close by his father's bed-room door. Here the stifled hiccups burst beyond all control; and asserted themselves by one convulsive yelp, which betrayed Zack into a start of horror. The start shook his candlestick: the extinguisher dropped out, hopped playfully down the stone stairs, and rolled over the landing with a lively ring—a devilish flourish of exultation in honour of its own activity.

"Oh Lord!" ejaculated Zack, as he heard somebody's voice speaking, and somebody's body moving, in the bed-room; and remembered that he had to mount another flight of stairs—wooden stairs—before he got to his own quarters.

He went up, however, with the recklessness of despair; every separate stair creaking and cracking as if a young elephant had been retiring to bed. He blew out his light, tore off his clothes, and, slipping between the sheets, began to breathe elaborately, as if fast asleep—in the desperate hope of being able to deceive his father, if Mr. Thorpe came up stairs to look after him.

No sooner had he assumed a recumbent position than a ceaseless singing began in his ears, which bewildered him. His bed, the room, the house, the whole world tore round and round, and heaved up and down frantically. He became a giddy atom, spinning drunkenly in space. He started up in bed, recalled to a sense of his humanity by a cold perspiration and a deathly qualm. Hiccups burst from him no longer; but were succeeded by another and a louder series of sounds—sounds familiar to everybody who has been at sea—sounds lamentably associated with whirling waves, and misery of mortal stomachs walling in emetic despair.

In pauses between the rapidly successive attacks of the

malady which now overwhelmed him, and which he attributed in after-life to the influences of toasted cheese, Zack was conscious of the sound of slippered feet ascending the stairs. His back was to the door. He had no strength to move, no courage to look round, no voice to raise in supplication. He knew that his door was opened—that a light came into the room—that a voice cried “Degraded beast!”—that the door was shut again with a bang—and that he was left once more in darkness. He did not care for the light, or the voice, or the banging of the door: he did not think of them afterwards; he did not mourn over the past, or speculate on the future. He sank back on his pillow with a gasp, drew the clothes over him with a groan, and fell asleep, blissfully reckless of the retribution that was to come.

When he awoke, late next morning, conscious of nothing, at first, except that it was thawing, and that he had a violent headache, but gradually recalled to a remembrance of the fight in the Snuggery by soreness in his ribs, and a conviction that his nose had become too large for his face, Zack’s memory began, confusedly, to retrace the circumstances attending his return home, and his disastrous journey up stairs. With these recollections were mingled others of the light which had penetrated into his room, after his candle was out; of the voice which had denounced him as a “Degraded beast;” and of the banging of the door which followed. No doubt his father had entered the room and apostrophised him in the emphatic terms which he was calling to mind. Never had Mr. Thorpe, on any former occasion, been known to call names, or bang doors. It was clear that he had discovered everything, and was exasperated as he had never been exasperated with any human being before.

Just as Zack arrived at this conclusion, he heard the rustling of his mother’s dress, and Mrs. Thorpe, with her handkerchief to her eyes, presented herself wofully at his bedside. Profoundly and penitently wretched, he tried to gain his mother’s forgiveness before he encountered his father’s wrath. He was so ashamed to meet her eye, that he turned his face to the wall, and in that position appealed to his mother’s compassion in moving terms, and with the most vehement protestations which he had ever addressed to her.

The only effect he produced was to make her walk up and down the room, sobbing bitterly. Now and then a few words

burst incoherently from her lips. They were just articulate enough for him to gather that his father had discovered everything, had suffered in consequence from an attack of palpitation of the heart, and had felt himself so unequal to deal unaided with his son's offence that he had gone out to request the co-operation of the Reverend Aaron Yollop. Zack's penitence changed instantly into a curious mixture of indignation and alarm. He turned quickly towards his mother. But, before he could open his lips, she informed him, speaking with unexampled severity, that he was on no account to think of going to the office, but was to wait at home until his father's return—and then hurried from the room. Mrs. Thorpe distrusted her own inflexibility, if she stayed too long in the presence of her penitent son; but Zack could not, unhappily, know this. He could only see that she left him abruptly, after delivering an ominous message; and could only place the gloomiest interpretation on her conduct.

"When mother turns against me, I've lost my last chance." He stopped before he ended the sentence, and sat up in bed, deliberating. "I could make up my mind to bear anything from my father, because he has a right to be angry after what I've done. But if I stand old Yollop again, I'll be—" Here, whatever Zack said was smothered in the sound of a blow, expressive of fury, which he administered to the mattress. Having relieved himself thus, he jumped out of bed, pronouncing at last in earnest those few words which had often burst from his lips in other days as an empty threat:—

"It's all over with me: I must bolt."

He refreshed both body and mind by a good wash; but his resolution did not falter. He hurried on his clothes, looked out of window, listened at his door; and all this time his purpose never changed. Remembering too well the persecution he had already suffered at the hands of Mr. Yollop, the conviction that it would now be repeated with fourfold severity was enough to keep him firm to his intention. When he had done dressing, his thoughts were recalled by the sight of his pocket-book to his companion of the past night. As he reflected on the appointment for Thursday morning, his eyes brightened, and he said to himself, while he turned resolutely to the door, "That queer fellow talked of going back to America. If I can't do anything else, I'll go with him!"

Just as his hand was on the lock, he was startled by a knock at the door. He opened it, and found the housemaid

with a letter for him. Returning to the window, he hastily undid the envelope. Several gaily-printed invitation-cards dropped out. There was a letter among them in Mr. Blyth's handwriting:—

“Wednesday.

“My dear Zack,—Enclosed are the tickets for my picture show, which I told you about. I send them now, instead of waiting to give them to you to-night, at Lavinie's suggestion. She thinks only three days' notice, from now to Saturday, short, and considers it advisable to save a few hours, so as to enable you to give your friends the most time possible to make arrangements for coming to my studio. Post all the invitation tickets, therefore, that you send about among your connection, at once, as I am posting mine; and you will save a day. Patty is obliged to pass your house this morning, so I send my letter by her.

“Introduce anybody you like; but I should prefer intellectual people; my ‘Columbus in sight of the New World’ being treated mystically, and, therefore, adapted to tax the popular mind to the utmost. Please warn your friends that it is a work of high art, and that nobody can understand it in a hurry.

“Affectionately yours,

“V. BLYTH.”

This letter reminded Zack of certain recent aspirations in the direction of the fine arts, which had escaped his slippery memory, while thinking of his future prospects. “I'll stick to my first idea,” he thought, “and be an artist, if Blyth will let me, after what's happened. If he won't, I've got Mat to fall back upon.

Reflecting thus, Zack descended cautiously to the back parlour, which was called a “library.” No one was in the room. He went in, and scrawled the following answer to Mr. Blyth's letter:—

“My dear Blyth,—Thank you for the tickets. I have got into a dreadful scrape, having been found out coming home tipsy at four in the morning, which I did by stealing the door-key. My prospects after this are so unpleasant that I am going to bolt. I write these lines in a tearing hurry, for fear my father should come home before I have done—he having gone to Yollop's to set the parson at me again.

“I can't come to-night, because your house would be the first place they would send to after me. But I mean to be an artist, if you won't desert me. Don't, my

dear fellow! I know I'm a scamp; but I'll try and be a reformed character if you stick by me. When you take your walk to-morrow, I shall be at the turnpike in the Laburnum Road, waiting for you, at three. If you won't come there, or won't speak to me when you do come, I shall leave England and take to something desperate.

"I have got a new friend—the most interesting fellow in the world. He has been half his life in the wilds of America; so, if you don't give me the go-by, I shall bring him to see your picture of Columbus.

"I feel so miserable, and have got such a headache, that I can't write any more. Ever yours,

"Z. THORPE, JUN."

After directing this letter, and placing it in his pocket to be put into the post by his own hand, Zack looked towards the door and hesitated—advanced a step or two to go out—and ended by returning to the writing-table, and taking a fresh sheet of paper.

"I can't leave the old lady (though she won't forgive me) without writing a line to keep up her spirits and say good-bye," he thought, as he began in his usual scrawling way. But he could not get beyond "My dear Mother." The writing of those three words seemed to have paralysed him. The strong hand that had struck out so sturdily all through the fight, trembled now at touching a sheet of paper. Still, he tried desperately to write something, even if only the one word, "Good-bye"—tried till tears came, and made further effort hopeless.

He crumpled up the paper and rose hastily, brushing away the tears, and feeling a strange distrust of himself as he did so. It was rarely that his eyes were moistened as they were moistened now. Few human beings have lived to be twenty without shedding more tears than had ever been shed by Zack.

"I can't write to her while I'm at home, and I know she's in the next room. I will send a letter when I'm out of the house, saying it's only for a time, and that I'm coming back when the angry part of this business is blown over." Such was his resolution as he tore up the crumpled paper and went out into the passage.

He took his hat from the table. His hat? No: he remembered that it was the hat which had been taken from the man at the tavern. At the most momentous instant of his life—

when his heart was bowing down before the thought of his mother—when he was leaving home in secret, perhaps for ever—the current of his thoughts could be altered in its course by the influence of such a trifle!

The rain which accompanied the thaw was falling fast; inside the house was dead silence, and outside it damp desolation, as Zack opened the street door, and dashed out desperately through mud and water, to cast himself loose on the thronged world of London as a fugitive from home.

He paused before he took the turning out of the square; the recollections of weeks, months, years past, all whirling through his memory. He paused, looking through the foggy atmosphere at the door which he had just left—never, it might be, to approach again; then moved away, buttoned his coat over his chest with trembling fingers, and saying to himself, "I've done it. nothing can undo it now," turned his back on Baregrove Square.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH BEGUN.

The street which Mat had chosen for his place of residence was situated in a densely populous, and by no means respectable, neighbourhood. In Kirk Street men of the fustian jacket and seal-skin cap clustered tumultuous round the gin-shop. Here ballad-bellowing, and organ grinding, and voices of costermongers never ceased through the day, and penetrated far into the frowsy repose of night. Here, on Saturday evenings especially, the butcher smacked with appreciating hand fat carcasses; and, flourishing his steel, roared to every woman who passed with a basket, to come and buy—buy—buy! Here, with foul frequency, the language of the natives was interspersed with such words as reporters indicate in newspapers by an expressive black line; and on this "beat" the night police were chosen from men of mighty strength to protect the sober part of the community, and of notable cunning to persuade the drunken part to retire harmlessly brawling into the seclusion of their own homes.

Never was tenant known to make such conditions with a landlord as were made by this eccentric stranger. Every household convenience with which the people at the lodgings could offer to accommodate him, Mat considered a domestic nuisance which

it was particularly desirable to get rid of. He stipulated that nobody should clean his room but himself; that the servant-of-all-work should never make his bed, or offer to put sheets on it, or cook him a morsel of dinner when he stopped at home; and that he should be free to stay away for days and nights together, if he chose, without landlord or landlady presuming to be anxious about him, as long as they had his rent in their pockets. This rent he covenanted to pay beforehand, week by week, as long as his stay lasted; and he was ready to fee the servant occasionally, provided she would engage solemnly "not to upset his temper by doing anything for him."

The proprietor of the house (and tobacco-shop) was at first inclined to be distrustful; but as he was likewise familiar with poverty, he was not proof against the auriferous halo which the production of a handful of sovereigns shed over the oddities of the new lodger. The bargain was struck; and Mat went to fetch his personal baggage.

After some little time, he returned with a large corn-sack on his back, and a long rifle in his hand. This was his luggage.

First putting the rifle on his bed, in the back-room, he cleared away the little furniture with which the front room was decorated; packing the three rickety chairs together in one corner, and turning up the cracked round table in another. Untying a piece of cord which secured the mouth of the corn-sack, he emptied it over his shoulder into the middle of the room—just (as the landlady afterwards said) as if it was coals coming in. Among the things which fell out in a heap were—some bearskins and a splendid buffalo-hide, neatly packed; a pipe, two red flannel shirts, a tobacco-pouch, and an Indian blanket; a leather bag, a gunpowder flask, two squares of soap, a bullet mould, and a nightcap; a tomahawk, a paper of nails, a scrubbing-brush, a hammer, and an old gridiron. Having emptied the sack, Mat took up the buffalo hide, and spread it on his bed, with a very expressive sneer at the patchwork counterpane and meagre curtains. He next threw down the bear skins, with the empty sack under them, in an unoccupied corner; propped up the leather bag between two angles in the wall; took his pipe from the floor; left everything else lying in the middle of the room; and, sitting on the bearskins with his back against the bag, told the astonished landlord that he was quite settled, and would thank him to go downstairs, and send up a pound of the strongest tobacco he had.

Mat's subsequent proceedings during the day—especially such as were connected with his method of laying in provisions, and cooking his dinner—exhibited the same extraordinary disregard of all civilised precedent which had marked his entry into the lodgings. After he had dined, he took a nap on his bear skins; woke up grumbling at the close air and confined room; smoked a long series of pipes looking out of the window all the time with quietly observant, constantly attentive eyes; and, finally, rising to the climax of all his previous oddities, came down when the tobacco shop was being shut after the closing of the neighbouring theatre, and asked which was his nearest way into the country, as he wanted to clear his head, and stretch his legs, by making a walking night of it in the fresh air.

He began next morning by cleaning both his rooms thoroughly; and seemed to enjoy the occupation in his own grim way. His dining, napping, smoking, and observant study of the street view from his window, followed as on the previous day. But at night, instead of setting forth into the country as before, he wandered into the streets; and, in the course of his walk, happened to pass the Snuggery. What happened there is already known; but what became of him afterwards remains to be seen.

On leaving Zack, he walked on; not noticing whither he went, not turning to go back till daybreak. It was past nine before he presented himself at the tobacco-shop, bringing in with him a goodly share of mud and wet from the thawing ground outside. His walk did not seem to have relieved the uneasiness of mind which had induced him to separate so suddenly from Zack. He talked perpetually to himself in a muttering incoherent way; his brow was contracted, and the scars on his face looked angry and red. The first thing he did was to make inquiries of his landlord relating to the part of London in which a certain terminus that he had been told of was situated. Finding it not easy to make him understand any directions connected with this, the shopkeeper suggested sending for a cab to take him to the railway. He briefly assented; occupying the time before the vehicle arrived in walking sullenly backwards and forwards over the pavement in front of the shop.

When the cab came, he insisted, with characteristic regardlessness of appearances, on riding upon the roof because he could get more air to blow over him, and more space for his legs in, there than outside. Arriving in this vagabond fashion at

the terminus, he took his ticket for Dibbledean, a little market town in one of the midland counties.

When he was set down at the station, he looked about him perplexedly at first; but soon appeared to recognise a road, which led to the town; and towards which he directed his steps, scorning accommodation from the local omnibus.

Mat slackened his pace more and more as he approached the town, until he slackened it altogether, by coming to a standstill under the walls of the old church, which stood at one extremity of the High Street, in what seemed to be the suburban district of Dibbledean. He waited for some time, looking over the low parapet wall which divided the churchyard from the road—then slowly approached a gate leading to a path among the grave-stones—stopped at it—changed his purpose—and, turning abruptly, walked up the High Street.

He did not pause again till opposite a long, low, gabled house, evidently one of the oldest buildings in the place, though brightly painted, to look as new and unpicturesque as possible. The basement was divided into two shops; which, however, proclaimed themselves as belonging, and having belonged in former days, to one and the same family. Over the larger of the two was painted:—

Bradford and Son (late Joshua Grice), Linendrapers and Hosiers.

The board on which these words were was continued over the smaller shop, where it was additionally superscribed:—

Mrs. Bradford (late Johanna Grice, Milliner).

Regardless of rain, and droppings from eaves that trickled heavily down his hat and coat, Mat stood motionless, reading and re-reading these inscriptions. Though the man, from top to toe, was the very impersonation of firmness, he hesitated unnaturally now. At one moment he seemed on the point of entering the shop—at another, he turned half round towards the churchyard which he had left behind. At last he decided to go back to the churchyard.

He entered quickly by the gate at which he had delayed before; and pursued the path among the graves a little way. Then striking off over the grass, after a moment's looking about him, he wound his course hither and thither among the turf mounds, and suddenly stopped at a flat tombstone, raised horizontally above the earth by a foot of brickwork.

There were four inscriptions, all of the simplest and shortest,

comprising nothing but a record of the names, ages, and birth and death dates of the dead. The first inscriptions notified the deaths of children:—"Joshua Grice, son of Joshua and Susan Grice, of this parish, aged four years;" and "Susan Grice, daughter of the above, aged thirteen years." The next death recorded was the mother's; and the last was the father's, at sixty-two. It was on the record of the death of Joshua Grice the elder that the eyes of the reader rested longest; his lips murmuring, as he looked on the letters:—"He lived to be an old man—he lived to be an old man after all!"

There was sufficient space towards the bottom of the tombstone for two or three more inscriptions; and it appeared as if Mat expected to have seen more. He looked intently at the vacant space, and measured it with his fingers, comparing it with the space above occupied by letters. "Not there, at any rate!" he said to himself, as he walked back to the town.

This time he entered the double shop—the hosiery division—without hesitation. No one was there, but the young man behind the counter. And glad the young man looked, having been long left without a soul to speak to that rainy morning, to see some one—even a stranger with an amazing skull-cap under his hat—enter.

What could he serve the gentleman with? The gentleman had not come to buy. He only desired to know whether Joanna Grice, who used to keep the dressmaker's shop, was still living?

Still living, certainly! the young man replied, with brisk civility. Miss Grice, whose brother once had the business now carried on by Bradford and Son, still resided in the town; and was a curious old person, who never went out, and let nobody inside her doors. Most of her friends were dead; and those still alive she had broken with. She was suspected of being crazy; and was execrated by the boys of Dibbledean as an "old tiger cat." In all probability, her intellects were shaken, years ago, by a dreadful scandal in the family, which quite crushed them, being respectable, religious people —

At this point the young man was interrupted, in a very uncivil manner, by the stranger, who desired to hear nothing about the scandal, but who had another question to ask. This seemed difficult to put; for he began it two or three times, in different forms of words, and failed to get on with it. At last, he ended

by asking whether any other members of old Mr. Grice's family were still alive.

For a moment or so the shopman was puzzled, and asked what other members the gentleman meant. Old Mrs. Grice had died some time ago; and there had been two children who died young, and whose names were in the churchyard. Did the gentleman mean the second daughter, who lived and grew up beautiful, and was the cause of the scandal? If so, the young person ran away, and died—nobody knew how; and was supposed to have been buried like a pauper—nobody knew where, unless it was Miss Grice—"

The young man stopped. A sudden change had passed over the strange gentleman's face. His swarthy cheeks had turned to a cold clay colour, through which his scars seemed to burn like streaks of fire. His hand and arm trembled as he leaned against the counter. Was he going to be taken ill? No: he walked at once from the counter to the door—turned round, and asked where Joanna Grice lived. The young man answered: Miss Grice's was the last cottage on the left; but it would be quite useless to go there, for she let nobody in. The gentleman thanked him, and went, nevertheless.

"I didn't think it would have took me so," Mat said, walking up the street; "and it wouldn't if I'd heard it anywhere else. But I'm not the man I was, now I'm in the old place. Over twenty years of hardening, don't seem to have hardened me yet!"

He followed the directions given him, arrived at the cottage, and tried the garden gate. It was locked; and there was no bell. But the paling was low, and Mat was not scrupulous. He got over it, and advanced to the cottage door. It opened, like other doors in the country, merely by turning the handle. He went in without hesitation, and entered the first room into which the passage led. It was a small parlour; and at the back window, which looked out on a garden, sat Joanna Grice, a dwarfish old woman, poring over a Bible. She started from her chair, as she heard footsteps, and tottered fiercely, with wild grey eyes and threatening hands, to meet the intruder. He let her come close to him; then mentioned a name—pronouncing it twice, very distinctly.

She pause dinstantly, livid, with gaping lips, and arms rigid at her side; as if that name, or the voice, had frozen in a moment the little life left in her. Then she moved back slowly, groping with her hands like one in the dark—back, till she

touched the wall of the room. Against this she leaned, trembling violently; not speaking a word; her wild eyes staring panic-stricken on the man confronting her.

He sat down unbidden, and asked if she did not remember him. No answer was given; no movement made that might serve instead of an answer. He asked again; a little impatiently. She nodded and stared—still speechless, still trembling.

He told her what he had heard; and asked whether it was true that the daughter of old Mr. Grice, who was the cause of the scandal, had died long since, away from home, and in a miserable way?

There was something in his look which seemed to oblige her to answer against her will. She said Yes; and trembled more violently than ever.

He clasped his hands; his head dropped; dark shadows seemed to move over his bent face; and the scars of the old wounds deepened to a livid violet.

His silence seemed to inspire Joanna Grice with sudden courage. She moved from the wall, and a gleam of triumph lightened over her face, as she reiterated her last answer. "Yes! the wretch who ruined the good name of the family was dead—dead, and buried far off, in some grave by herself—not there, in the churchyard with her father and mother—no, thank God, not there!"

He looked up at her, when she said those words. There was warning influence in his eye, as it rested on her, which sent her cowering to her former place against the wall. Mentioning the name for the first time, he asked sternly where Mary was buried. The reply—doled out doggedly and slowly, forced from her word by word—was that Mary was buried among strangers, as she deserved to be—at Bangbury—far away in the next county, where she died.

His manner became less roughly imperative; his eyes softened; his voice saddened, when he spoke again. And yet, the next question that he put to Joanna Grice seemed to pierce her to the quick. The muscles were writhing on her haggard face, her breath burst from her in fierce pantings, as he asked, whether it was only suspicion, or the truth, that Mary was with child when she left home?

No answer was given. He repeated the question, and insisted on having one. Was it suspicion or truth? The reply hissed out at him in one whispered word—Truth.

Was the child born alive?

The answer came again in the same harsh whisper—Yes.

What became of it?

She never saw it—never asked about it—never knew. While she replied, her whispering accents changed, and rose suddenly to hoarse, distinct tones. But it was not till the questioner spoke once more that smothered fury flashed into flaming rage. Then, as he raised his head and opened his lips, she staggered, with outstretched arms, to the table at which she had been reading; and struck her bony hands on the open Bible; and swore by the Word of Truth in that Book, that she would answer no more.

He rose; and with something of contempt in his look, approached the table and spoke. But his voice was drowned by hers, bursting from her in screams of fury. No! no! Not a word more! How dare he come there, with shameless face and threatening eyes, and make her speak of what should never have passed her lips again—never till she went to render her account at the Judgment Seat! Relations! let him not speak of relations. The only kindred she cared to own, lay heart-broken in the churchyard. Relations! if they all came to life again this minute, what could she have to do with them, whose only relation was Death? Death, that was father, mother, brother, sister now! Death, that was waiting to take her in God's good time. What! would he stay on in spite of her? stay after she had sworn not to answer another word?

Yes; he was resolved to stay—and to know more. Had Mary left nothing behind on the day she fled?

Some sudden resolution seemed to calm the fury of Johanna Grice's passion, while he said those words. She stretched out her arm and gripped him by the arm, and looked up in his face with wicked exultation in her eyes.

Between the leaves of Joanna Grice's Bible was a key, used as a marker. She took it out, and led the way, with hands outstretched for support to the wall on one side and the bannisters on the other, up the one flight of stairs which communicated with the bedroom story of the cottage.

He followed close: and was standing by her side when she opened a door, and pointed into a room, telling him to take what he found there, and then go—she cared not whither.

She descended the stairs as he entered the room. There was a close, airless smell in it. Cobwebs, brown with dirt, hung from the ceiling. The grimy window-panes saddened the light that

poured through them faintly. He saw no furniture anywhere; no sign that the room had been lived in, entered even, for years. He looked again, more carefully: and detected, in one dim corner, something covered with dust, which looked like a small box.

He pulled it out towards the window. Dust flew from it in clouds. He stirred it with his foot nearer to the faint light, and saw that it was a common deal-box, corded. He looked closer, and through cobwebs, and foul stains of all kinds, spelt out a name painted on it: "Mary Grice."

At the sight of that name he paused; and, at the same moment, heard the parlour door locked. He stooped, took up the box by the cord, and left the room. His hand touched a substance as he grasped the cord, which did not feel like wood. Examining the box by the clearer light falling on the landing, he discovered a letter nailed to the cover. There was something written on it; but the paper was dusty, the ink faded, and the characters hard to decipher. By dint of perseverance he made out this inscription: "Justification of my conduct towards my niece: to be read after my death. Joanna Grice."

As he passed the parlour door, he heard her voice, reading. He stopped and listened. The words seemed familiar; and yet he knew not, at first, what book they came from. He listened a little longer; his recollections of his boyhood helped him; and he knew that the book from which Joanna Grice was reading aloud to herself was the Bible.

His face darkened, and he went quickly into the garden; but stopped before he reached the paling, and, turning back to the front window of the parlour, looked in. He saw her sitting with her back to him, with elbows on the table, and hands working feverishly in her tangled grey hair. Her voice was audible; but the words could no longer be distinguished. He waited at the window for a few moments; then left it suddenly, saying to himself: "I wonder the book don't strike her dead!" Those were his only words of farewell. With that thought in his heart, he turned his back on the cottage.

He went on through the rain, taking the box with him, and looking about for some sheltered place in which he could open it. After walking nearly a mile, he saw an old cattle-shed, a rotten, deserted place; but it afforded some little shelter, even yet: so he entered.

There was one dry corner; dry enough, at least, to suit his purpose. In that he knelt, and cut the cord round the box—hesitated before he opened it—and began by tearing the letter outside from the nail that fastened it to the cover.

It was a long letter, in a close, crabbed hand. He ran his eye over it impatiently, till his attention was caught by two or three lines, more clearly penned than the rest. For many years he had been unused to reading written characters; but he spelt out resolutely the words in the few lines which struck his eye, and found they ran thus:—

"I now only add, before preceding to the miserable confession of our family dishonour, that I never afterwards saw, and only once heard of, the man who tempted my niece to commit the deadly sin, which was her ruin in this world, and will be her ruin in the next."

Beyond those words, he made no effort to read. Thrusting the letter into his pocket, he turned once more to the box.

It was sealed with strips of tape, but not locked. He forced the lid, and saw a few simple articles of woman's wearing apparel; a little work-box; a lace-collar, with the needle and thread still sticking in it; several letters, here tied in a packet, there scattered carelessly; a gaily-bound album; a quantity of dried ferns and flower leaves that had fallen from between the pages; a piece of canvas with a slipper-pattern worked on it; and a black dress waistcoat with unfinished embroidery on the collar. It was plain that these things had been thrown into the box anyhow, and left just as they were thrown. For a moment he kept his eyes fixed on the sad significance of the confusion displayed; then turned away his head, whispering mournfully and many times, that name of "Mary," which he had pronounced while in the presence of Joanna. After a little, he mechanically picked out the letters scattered about the box; mechanically eyed the broken seals and the addresses; mechanically put them back again unopened, until he came to one which felt as if it had something inside it. This stimulated him into examining what the letter might contain.

Nothing but a piece of paper, folded. He undid the folds, and found part of a lock of hair inside, which he wrapped up again the moment he saw it, as if anxious to conceal it. The letter he examined deliberately. It was a woman's handwriting, directed to "Miss Mary Grice, Dibbledean;" and only dated "Bond Street, London. Wednesday." The post-mark,

however, showed that it had been written years ago.

"My dearest Mary,—

"I have just sent you your pretty hair bracelet by the coach, nicely sealed. I have directed it to you by your own name, as I direct this, remembering what you told me about your father making it a point of honour never to open your letters; and forbidding that ugly Aunt Johanna of yours to do so either. I hope you will receive this and the little packet about the same time.

"I will answer for your thinking the pattern of your bracelet much improved since the new hair has been worked in with the old. How you will run to your own room, and blush unseen, like the flower in the poem, when you look at it! You may be surprised to see some gold fastenings introduced as additions; but this, the jeweller told me was a matter of necessity. Your poor dear sister's hair being the only material of the bracelet, when you sent it to me to be altered, was very different from the hair of that faultless true-love of yours which you also sent to be worked in with it. It was, in fact, hardly half long enough to plait properly with poor Susan's, from end to end; so the jeweller had to join it with little gold clasps, as you will see.

"Do you see him as often as ever. He ought to be faithful to you, when you show how dearly you love him by mixing his hair with poor Susan's, whom you were always so attached to. I say he ought; but you are sure to say he will—and I am quite ready to believe you the wiser.

"It is the London season now, and we are worked out of our lives. I envy you dressmakers in the country; and almost wish I was back again at Dibbledean, to be tyrannised over by Miss Johanna. I know she is your aunt, dear; but I can't help saying that I hate her very name!

"Ever your affectionate friend,

"JANE HOLDSWORTH.

"P.S.—The jeweller sent back the hair he did not want; and I, as in duty bound, return it to you, its lawful owner."

Those scars, which indicated the stir of strong feelings within him more palpably than his expression or his manner, began to burn redly while he spelt his way through this letter. He crumpled it hastily round the enclosure, instead of folding it as it had been folded before; and was about to cast it back into the box, when the sight of the wearing apparel and half-finished work inside seemed to stay his hand. He smoothed out the paper with

care, and placed it gently among the rest of the letters—then looked at the box thoughtfully; took from his pocket the letter he had first examined, and dropped it in among the others—then suddenly and sharply closed the lid.

“I can’t touch any more of her things,” he said; “I can’t look at ’em somehow, without its making me—” he stopped to tie up the box; straining at the cords, as if the physical exertion of pulling at something was a relief. “I’ll open it again in a day or two, when I’m away from the old place,” he resumed, jerking at the last knot—“and have got to be my own man again.”

He regained the road; and stopped, looking all round him, indecisively. Where should he go next? To the grave, where Mary lay buried? No: not until he had read all the letters and carefully examined the objects in the box. Back to London, and to his promised meeting with Zack? Yes—back to London.

CHAPTER IV.

FATE WORKS, WITH ZACK FOR AN INSTRUMENT

A quarter of an hour’s rapid walking took Zack out of the neighbourhood of Baregrove Square, and launched him loose on the world. He had a silk handkerchief and sevenpence half-penny in his pocket—his available assets consisted of a gold watch and chain—his only article of baggage was a blackthorn stick—and his anchor of hope the Pawnbroker.

His first action, now that he had become his own master, was to go to the nearest stationer’s that he could find, and there write the penitent letter to his mother over which his heart had failed him. It was as awkward and incoherent a production as ever was composed. But Zack felt easier when he had completed it—easier still when he had dropped it into the post-office along with his letter to Mr. Blyth.

The next duty that claimed him was the first great duty of civilised humanity—the filling of an empty purse. Most young gentlemen would have found the process of pawning a watch, in broad daylight, rather embarrassing. But Zack was impervious to a sense of respectability. He marched into the first pawnbroker’s with as solemn an air of business, and marched out again with as serene an expression of satisfaction, as if he had just been drawing a handsome salary.

Provided with pecuniary resources, Zack felt at liberty to indulge in a holiday of his own granting. He opened the festival by a long ride in a cab, with a packet of cigars to keep the weather from affecting his spirits. He closed the festival with a visit to the theatre, a supper in mixed company, self-oblivion, and a blinding headache next morning. Thus much for the narrative of his holiday. The proceedings, on his part, which followed, claim attention next; and are of sufficient importance, in the results to which they led, to mention in detail.

The next morning was the beginning of an important day in Zack's life. Much depended on the interviews he was about to seek with Mat, in Kirk Street, and with Mr. Blyth, at the turnpike in Laburnum Road. His conscience was not altogether easy, when he recalled a passage in his letter to his mother, which had assured her that he was on the high road to reformation. "I'll make a clean breast to Blyth, and do what he tells me, when I meet him at the turnpike." Fortifying himself with this resolution, Zack arrived at Kirk Street, and knocked at the private door.

Mat, having seen him from the window, called to him to come up, as soon as the door was opened. The moment they shook hands, young Thorpe noticed that his friend looked altered. His face seemed downcast and weary.

"What's happened?" asked Zack. "You have been in the country, haven't you? What news do you bring back? Good, I hope?"

"Bad," returned Mat, gruffly. "Don't say another word about it. If you do, we part company. Talk of something else. Anything you like."

Forbidden to discourse concerning his friend's affairs, Zack veered about, and began to discourse concerning his own. Candour was one of his few virtues: and he now confided to Mat the entire history of his tribulations.

Without displaying the smallest astonishment or the slightest sympathy, Mat stood listening until Zack had done. He then went to the corner where the round table was; pulled the up-turned lid back upon the pedestal; drew from the breast-pocket of his coat a roll of beaver skin; undid it; displayed a goodly collection of bank notes; and said to young Thorpe,—"Take what you want."

It was not easy to surprise Zack; but this proceeding so

astonished him, that he stared at the bank notes in amazement. Mat took his pipe from a nail, filled the bowl with tobacco, and pointing with the stem towards the table, gruffly repeated,—
“Take what you want.”

This time Zack found words in which to express himself, and used them freely to praise his friend's generosity, and to decline taking a farthing. Mat deliberately lit his pipe.

“Young 'un, keep that talking for somebody else: it's gibberish to me. Help yourself. Money's what you want—though you won't own it. That's money. When it's gone, I can go to California and get more. While it lasts, make it spin. What is there to stare at? I told you I'd be brothers with you, because of what you done the other night. Well, I'm being brothers with you now. Get your watch out of pawn, and shake a loose leg at the world. Will you take what you want. When you have, tie up the rest, and chuck 'em over here.” With these words the man of the black skull cap sat down on his bear-skins, and surrounded himself with clouds of tobacco smoke.

Finding it impossible to make Mat understand those refinements of civilised life which induce one gentleman (always excepting a clergyman at Easter) to decline accepting money from another as a gift—perceiving that he was resolved to receive all remonstrances as declarations of distrust—and well knowing that a little money to go on with would be very acceptable under existing circumstances, Zack consented to take two ten-pound notes as a loan. At this reservation Mat chuckled contemptuously; but young Thorpe enforced it, by tearing a leaf out of his pocket-book, and writing an acknowledgment for the sum borrowed. Mat roughly refused to receive the document; but Zack tied it up with the bank-notes, and threw the beaver skin roll back to its owner.

“Do you want a bed?” asked Mat next. “Say yes or no at once! I won't have no more gibberish. It's no use trying it on with me, young 'un. I'm not much better than a cross between a savage and a Christian. I'm a battered, scalped old vagabond—that's what I am! But I'm brothers with you. What's mine is yours; and if you tell me it isn't again, me and you quarrel. Do you want a bed? Yes? or No?”

Yes; Zack wanted a bed; but—

“There's one,” remarked Mat, pointing through the folding-doors into the back room. “I don't want it. I haven't slept in a bed these twenty years, and I can't. I take dog's snoozes

in this corner; and I shall take more dog's snoozes out of doors in the day-time, when the sun begins to shine.

Zack tried to expostulate again, but Mat interrupted him more gruffly than ever.

"I suppose you don't care to sleep next door to me," he said. "You wouldn't turn your back on a bit of my blanket, though, if we were out in the lonesome places together. You won't cotton to me all at once, I dare say. Well: I cotton to you in spite of that. Damn the bed! Take it or leave it."

Zack the reckless, always ready at five minutes' notice to make friends with any living being under heaven—Zack the gregarious, who in his days of roaming the country, before he was fettered to an office stool, had "cottoned" to every species of rustic vagabond, from a tinker to a poacher—at once declared that he would sleep in the offered bed that very night. Greatly relieved by this plain declaration, Mat crossed his legs on the floor, shook his great shoulders with a heartier chuckle than usual, and made his friend free of the premises in these hospitable words:—

"There! now the bother's over, I suppose. Pull in the buffalo hide, and bring your legs to an anchor. I'm smoking. Suppose you smoke too.—Hoi! Bring up a clean pipe," cried this rough diamond, turning up a corner of the carpet, and roaring through a crack in the floor into the shop below.

The pipe was brought. Zack sat on the buffalo hide, and began to ask his queer friend about life in the wilds of America. From short replies, Mat was gradually beguiled into relating some of his adventures. Wild fragments of narrative they were; mingling in one darkly-fantastic record, fierce triumphs and deadly dangers; miseries of cold, hunger, and thirst; glories of hunters' feasts; gold findings among desolate ricks; galloping for life from the blazing prairie; combats with wild beasts and men wilder still; weeks of awful solitude in primeval wastes; perilous orgies among drunken savages; visions of meteors in heaven, of hurricanes on earth, and of icebergs blinding bright when the sunshine was beautiful over the Polar seas.

Young Thorpe listened in a fever of excitement. Here was the desperate, roving life of which he had dreamed! He longed to engage in it: he could have listened to descriptions of it all day. But Mat was the last man to err on the side of diffuseness in relating his experience. And he provokingly stopped in the middle of an adventure among wild horses on the Pampas; declaring that he was tired of feeling his tongue wag, and had got

so sick of talking of himself, that he was determined not to open his mouth again—except to put a rump-steak and a pipe into it—for the rest of the day.

Finding it impossible to alter this resolution, Zack thought of his engagement with Mr. Blyth, and asked what time it was. Mat, having no watch, conveyed this inquiry into the shop by the same process of roaring through the crack in the ceiling which he had employed to produce a clean pipe. The answer showed Zack that he had barely time left to be punctual to his appointment in the Laburnum Road.

"I must be off to my friend," he said, putting on his hat; "but I shall be back in an hour or two. I say, have you thought yet about going back to America?" His eyes sparkled as he put this question.

"There ain't no need to think about it," answered Mat. "I mean to go back; but I haven't settled what day yet. I've got something to do first." His face darkened. "Never mind what it is; I've got it to do. Don't you ask again whether I've brought news from the country. Don't you do that, and we shall sail along easy enough. I like you, Zack, when you don't bother. If you want to go, what are you stopping for?"

Young Thorpe departed, laughing. He was in high spirits as he walked along, thinking of Mat's adventures. What was the happiest painter's life compared to such a life as he had just heard described? Zack was hardly in the Laburnum Road before he began to doubt whether he had really made up his mind to be guided by Mr. Blyth, and to devote all his energies to the cultivation of the fine arts.

Near the turnpike stood a gentleman, making a sketch in a note-book of some felled timber by the road side. This could be no other than Valentine—and Valentine it was.

Mr. Blyth looked serious, as he shook hands with young Thorpe. "Don't begin to justify yourself, Zack," he said; "I'm not going to blame you now. I have some news from Baregrove Square."

It appeared from the narrative on which Valentine entered that, immediately on the receipt of Zack's letter, he had called on Mr. Thorpe, with the kindly purpose of endeavouring to make peace between father and son. His mission had failed. Mr. Thorpe had grown more and more irritable as the interview proceeded; and had accused his visitor of interference, when

Valentine suggested the propriety of holding out some prospect of forgiveness to the runaway.

This Mr. Blyth had abstained from noticing, out of consideration for the state of the speaker's feelings. But when the Reverend Mr. Yollop came into the room, and joined in the conversation, words had been spoken which had obliged Valentine to leave the house. The reiteration of some arguments on the side of mercy which he had advanced, had caused Mr. Yollop to hint that Mr. Blyth's profession was not of a nature to render him capable of estimating properly the consequences of moral guilt; while Mr. Thorpe had referred to the scandalous reports spread abroad in certain quarters, years ago, on the subject of Madonna's parentage. These insinuations roused Valentine instantly. He denounced them as false in the strongest terms; and left the house, resolved never to hold communication again either with Mr. Yollop or Mr. Thorpe.

About an hour after his return, a letter marked "Private" had been brought to him from Mrs. Thorpe. The writer referred, with sorrow, to what had occurred at the interview of the morning; and earnestly begged Mr. Blyth to take into consideration the state of Mr. Thorpe's health, which was such that the family doctor had forbidden him to excite himself by receiving visitors, or by taking steps towards the recovery of his son. If these rules were not complied with for many days to come, the doctor declared that the palpitation of the heart, from which Mr. Thorpe had suffered on the night of Zack's return might occur again, and be strengthened into a confirmed malady.

Having referred to her husband, Mrs. Thorpe reverted to herself. She mentioned the receipt of a letter from Zack; but said it had done little towards calming her anxiety. Certain that Mr. Blyth would be the first friend her son would go to, she begged him to use his influence to keep Zack from leaving the country, which she feared he might be tempted to do. She asked this of Mr. Blyth as a favour, and hinted that if he would enable her, by granting it, to tell her husband, without details, that their son was under safe guidance, half the anxiety from which she was suffering would be alleviated. Here the letter ended abruptly.

"Now, Zack," said Valentine, "I shall only add that whatever has happened between your father and me, makes no difference in the respect I have always felt for your mother, and in my desire to do her every service in my power. I tell you fairly—as be-

tween friends—that I think you have been much to blame; but I have sufficient faith in you, to leave everything to be decided by your own sense of honour, and by the affection which I am sure you feel for your mother.”

This appeal, and the narrative which preceded it, had their effect on Zack. His ardour for a wandering life began to cool in the quiet temperature of the good influences now at work within him. “It shan’t be my fault, Blyth, if I don’t deserve your good opinion,” he said. “I’ve behaved badly; and I know, too, that I have had severe provocations. Only tell me what you advise, and I’ll do it—I will, upon my honour, for my mother’s sake.”

“That’s right!” cried Valentine, clapping him on the shoulder. “In the first place, it would be no use your going home at once—even if you were willing, which I am afraid you are not. In your father’s present state your return would do him harm, and do you no good. Employed, however, you must be while away from home; and what you’re fit for—unless it’s Art—I don’t know. You have been talking about wanting to be a painter; and now is the time to test your resolution. If I get you an order to draw in the British Museum, to fill up your mornings; and enter you at some private Academy, to fill up your evenings (mine at home is not half strict enough for you)—will you stick to it?”

“With all my heart,” replied Zack, dismissing his dreams of life in the wilds. “I ask nothing better, Blyth, than to stick to you and your plan for the future.”

“Bravo!” cried Valentine, in his old hearty manner. “The heaviest load of anxiety that has been on my shoulders for some time past is off now. I will write and comfort your mother this afternoon—”

“Give her my love,” interposed Zack.

“Giving her your love; in the belief, of course, that you are going to prove yourself worthy to send such a message,” continued Mr. Blyth. The sooner I write, the easier I shall be. By the bye, there’s another question starts up now, which your mother seems to have forgotten in the hurry of writing. What are you going to do about money? Have you thought about a place to live in? Can I help you?”

These questions admitted of but one answer, which the natural frankness of Zack led him to adopt without hesitation. He related the whole history of his first meeting with Mat

(formally describing him as Mr. Mathew Marksman), and of the visit to Kirk Street which had followed it that morning.

Though in no way remarkable for the possession of any extraordinary fund of worldly wisdom, Mr. Blyth shook his head suspiciously while he listened. He expressed decided disapprobation of the careless readiness with which Zack had allowed a perfect stranger to become intimate with him—reminding him that he had met his new acquaintance in a very disreputable place—and concluded by earnestly recommending him to break off all connection with so dangerous an associate.

Zack was not slow in mustering arguments to defend his conduct. He declared that Mr. Marksman had gone into the Snuggery innocently, and been insulted before he became the originator of the riot. As to his family affairs and his real name, he might have good reasons for concealing them; which was probable, as his account of himself in other respects was straightforward and unreserved. He might be eccentric, and have led an adventurous life; but it was not fair to condemn him, on that account, as a bad character. In conclusion, Zack cited the loan he had received, as a proof that the stranger could not be a swindler; and referred to the familiarity with localities and customs in California, shown in conversation that afternoon, as affording proof in support of his statement that he had gained his money by gold-digging.

Mr. Blyth, however, still held firmly to his opinion; and, first offering to advance the money from his own purse, suggested that young Thorpe should relieve himself of the obligation he had contracted by paying back what he had borrowed that afternoon.

"You don't know him as I do," replied Zack. "He wouldn't think twice about knocking me down, if I showed I distrusted him—and, Blyth, he's one of the few men alive who could do it."

"This is no laughing matter," said Valentine, shaking his head.

"I never was more serious," rejoined Zack. "I won't say I should be afraid, but I should be ashamed to pay him his money back on the day I borrowed it. Why, he refused to accept my written acknowledgment of the loan! I only succeeded in forcing it on him, by slipping it in among his bank-notes; and, if he finds it there, I'll lay you any wager he tears it up, or throws it into the fire."

Mr. Blyth began to look puzzled. The stranger's behaviour about the money was staggering.

"Let me bring him to your picture-show," pursued Zack. "Judge of him yourself, before you condemn him. I can't say fairer than that." Or will you come back with me to Kirk Street, where he lives?"

"I must write to your mother, before I do anything else; and I have work in hand for to-day and to-morrow," said Valentine. "You had better bring your friend as you propose. But remember the distinction I always make between my public studio and my private house. I consider the glorious mission of Art to apply to everybody; so I am proud to open my painting room to any honest man who wants to look at my pictures. But the freedom of my other rooms is only for my own friends. I can't have strangers brought up stairs."

"Of course! I shouldn't think of it, my dear fellow. Only look at old Rough and Tough, and hear him talk; I'll answer for the rest."

"Ah, Zack! Zack! I wish you were not so careless about whom you get acquainted with. I have often warned you that you will bring yourself or your friends into trouble some day. Where are you going now?"

"Back to Kirk Street. I promised Mat—"

"Remember what you promised me, and what I am going to promise your mother—"

"I'll remember everything, Blyth. Good bye and thank you. Only wait till we meet on Saturday, and you see my friend; you will find it all right."

"I hope I shan't find it all wrong," said Mr. Blyth, as he followed the road to his own house.

CHAPTER V.

FATE WORKS, WITH MR. BLYTH FOR AN INSTRUMENT.

The great day of the year in Valentine's house was always the day on which his pictures for the Royal Academy were shown in completed state to friends and admiring spectators, in his own painting room. His visitors represented almost every variety in the social scale; and grew numerous in proportion as they descended from the higher to the lower degrees. Thus, the aristocracy of race was usually impersonated, in his studio, by his one noble patron, the Dowager Countess of Brambledown; the aristocracy of art by two or three Royal Academicians; the

aristocracy of money by eight or ten highly respectable families, who came as much to look at the Dowager Countess as to look at the pictures. With these, the select portion of the company might be said to terminate; and, after them, flowed in promiscuously the obscure majority—a heterogeneous congregation of worshippers at the shrine of art, some of small importance, some of doubtful importance, some of no importance at all; and who included within their numbers, not only a sprinkling of Mr. Blyth's tradesmen, but also his gardener, his wife's old nurse, the brother of his housemaid, and the father of his cook. Some of his respectable friends deplored the "levelling tendencies" which induced him to admit a mixture of all classes into his painting room, on the day when he exhibited. But Valentine was warmly encouraged in this course, by no less a person than Lady Brambledown herself, whose pleasure it was to exhibit herself to society as an uncompromising Radical, a reviler of the Peerage, and a teller of scandalous Royal anecdotes.

On the eventful Saturday which was to display his works to an applauding public of private friends, Mr. Blyth's studio, thanks to Madonna, looked really in order—as neat and clean as a room could be. A semi-circle of all available chairs—drawing-room and bed-room chairs intermingled—ranged itself symmetrically in front of the pictures. That imaginative classical landscape, "The Golden Age," reposed grandly on its easel; while "Columbus in Sight of the New World"—the largest canvas Mr. Blyth had ever worked on, encased in the most gorgeous frame—was hung on the wall at an easy distance from the ground, having proved too bulky to be safely accommodated by any easel in Valentine's possession.

Except Mr. Blyth's bureau, all the ordinary furniture and general litter of the room had been cleared out of it, or hidden behind convenient draperies. Backwards and forwards over the space thus obtained, Mr. Blyth walked expectant, with the elastic skip peculiar to him; looking ecstatically at his pictures, as he passed and repassed them—now singing, now whistling; sometimes referring to a small manuscript, jauntily tied with blue ribbon; sometimes following the lines of the composition in "Columbus," by flourishing his right hand before it in the air, with dreamy artistic grace;—instinct from top to toe with an excitable activity which defied the idea of rest—and hospitably ready to rush to the door and receive the first visitor with open arms, at a moment's notice.

From eleven till three had been notified in the invitation cards as the time during which the pictures would be on view. It was long past ten. Madonna stood patiently by the window, looking attentively towards the road. Mrs. Blyth slowly turned over the engravings in her portfolio, and became so absorbed in them that she forgot how time was passing, and was astonished to hear Madonna suddenly clap her hands at the window, as a signal that the first visitor had passed the gate.

Mrs. Blyth raised her eyes, and smiled as she saw the girl puckering up her rosy face into a childish imitation of old age, bending gravely in a succession of formal bows, and kissing her hand several times with suavity and deliberation. These signs were meant to indicate Mrs. Blyth's father, whose old-fashioned habit it was to pay homage to his friends among the ladies, by saluting them from afar off with tremulous bows and gallant **kissings of the hand.**

"Ah!" thought Mrs. Blyth, nodding, to show that she understood—"Ah! there's father. I felt sure he would be first; and I know exactly what he will do when he gets in. He will admire the pictures more than anybody, and have a better opinion to give than anybody, but before he can mention a word to Valentine, there will be dozens of people in the painting-room, and then he will get nervous, and come up to me."

While Mrs. Blyth was thinking about her father, Madonna signalled the advent of two more visitors. First, she raised her hand sharply, and began pulling at an imaginary whisker on her own smooth cheek—then stood bolt upright, and folded her arms majestically. Mrs. Blyth recognised the originals of these two pantomime portrait-sketches. The one represented Mr. Hemlock, the small critic of a small newspaper, who was principally remarkable for never letting his whiskers alone for five minutes. The other portrayed Mr. Bullivant, the aspiring sculptor, who wrote poetry, and studied dignity in his attitudes so unremittingly, that he could not even look in at a shop window, without standing before it as if he was his own statue.

In a minute or two more, Mrs. Blyth heard a grating of wheels, and trampling of horses, and banging of carriage-steps violently let down. Madonna took a seat on the nearest chair, rolled the skirt of her dress up into her lap, tucked her hands inside it, then drew one out, and imitated the action of snuff-taking—looking up merrily, as much as to say, "You can't mistake that,

I think?"—Impossible! old Lady Brambledown, with her muff and snuff-box, to the life.

Close on the Dowager Countess followed a visitor of low degree. Madonna—looking a little afraid of the boldness of her imitation—began chewing an imaginary quid of tobacco; then pretended to pull it suddenly out of her mouth, and throw it behind her. It was over in a moment; but it represented to perfection Mangles, the gardener; who, though an inveterate chewer of tobacco, always threw away his quid when he confronted his betters, as a duty he owed to his respectability.

Another carriage. Madonna put on a supposititious pair of spectacles, pretended to pull them off, rub them, and put them on again; then, retiring from the window, spread out her dress in the widest dimensions it could assume. The new arrivals portrayed, were the doctor, whose spectacles were never clean enough to please him; and the doctor's wife, an emaciated fine lady, who deceitfully suggested the presence of vanished charms by wearing a balloon under her gown—which benevolent rumour pronounced to be only a crinolene petticoat.

Here there was a pause in the procession of visitors. Mrs. Blyth beckoned to Madonna, and began talking on her fingers. "No signs of Zack yet—are there love?" The girl looked anxiously towards the window, and shook her head.

"If he ventures up here when he does come, we must not be so kind to him as usual. He has been behaving very badly, and we must see if we can't make him ashamed of himself."

Madonna's colour rose directly. She looked amazed, sorry, perplexed, and incredulous by turns. Zack behaving badly?—she would never believe it!

"I mean to make him ashamed of himself, if he ventures near me!" pursued Mrs. Blyth.

"And I shall try if I can't console him," thought Madonna, turning away her head for fear her face should betray her.

Another ring! "There he is, perhaps," continued Mrs. Blyth, nodding in the direction of the window, as she signed those words.

Madonna ran to look: then turned, and with a comic air of disappointment, hooked her thumbs in the arm-holes of an imaginary waistcoat. Only Mr. Gimble, the picture-dealer, who always criticised works of art with hands in that position.

Just then, a soft knock sounded at Mrs. Blyth's door, and her father entered, sniffing with a certain perpetual cold which

nothing could cure—bowing, kissing his hand, and frightened up stairs by the company, as his daughter had predicted.

"Oh, Lavvie! the Countess is downstairs, and her ladyship likes the pictures," exclaimed the old man, snuffling and smiling infirmly in a flutter of nervous glee.

"Come and sit down by me, father, and see Madonna doing the visitors. It's funnier than any play that ever was acted."

"And her ladyship likes the pictures," repeated the engraver, his old watery eyes sparkling with pleasure as he told his good news over again, and sat by the bedside of his favourite child.

The rings at the bell began to multiply. Madonna was hardly still for a moment, so many were the visitors whose approach up the garden walk it was necessary for her to signalise. Downstairs, the seats in the painting room were filling rapidly; and the standers in the back places were two-deep already.

There was Lady Brambledown (whose calls at the studio always lasted the whole morning), sitting in the place of honour, taking snuff fiercely, talking liberal sentiments in a cracked voice, and feeling extreme pleasure in making the respectable middle class stare at her in reverent amazement. Also, two Royal Academicians—a saturnine Academician in a voluminous cloak; and a benevolent Academician, with a slovenly umbrella, and a perpetual smile. Also, the doctor and his wife, who admired the massive frame of "Columbus," but said not a word about the picture. Also, Mr. Bullivant, the sculptor, and Mr. Hemlock, the journalist, exchanging solemnly that critical small talk, in which such words as "sensuous," "æsthetic," "objective," and "subjective," occupy prominent places and out of which no man ever has succeeded or ever will succeed in extricating an idea. Also, Mr. Gimble, fluently laudatory, with the whole alphabet of Art-Jargon at his fingers' ends, and without the slightest comprehension of the subject to embarrass him in his flow of language. Also, certain respectable families who tried vainly to understand the pictures, opposed by other respectable families who never tried at all, but confined themselves exclusively to the Dowager Countess. Also, the obscure general visitors, who made up in enthusiasm what they wanted in distinction. And, finally, the absolute democracy, or low-life party among the spectators—represented by Mr. Blyth's gardener, and Mr. Blyth's cook's father—who, standing modestly outside the door, agreed, in awe-struck whispers, that "The

Golden Age" was a Tasty Thing, and "Columbus in Sight of the New World," a Beautiful Piece.

All Valentine's restlessness before the visitors arrived was as nothing compared with his rapturous activity now that they were assembled. Not once had he stood still, or ceased talking, since the first spectator entered. And not once, probably, would he have permitted either his legs or his tongue to take the slightest repose until the last guest had departed from the Studio, but for Lady Brambledown, who accidentally hit on the only available means of fixing his attention to one thing, and keeping him comparatively quiet in one place.

"I say, Blyth," cried her ladyship (she never prefixed the word "Mister" to the name of any male friend)—"I can't for the life of me understand your picture of Columbus. You talked about explaining it in detail. When are you going to begin?"

"Directly, my dear madam, directly: I was only waiting till the room got well filled," answered Valentine, taking up the long wand which he used to steady his hand while painting, and producing the manuscript tied with blue ribbon. "The fact is, I have just thrown together a few thoughts on art, as a sort of introduction to—to Columbus, in short. They are written on this—the thoughts are. Would anybody be kind enough to read them, while I point out what they mean on the picture? I only ask, because it seems egotistical to be reading my opinions about my own works. Will anybody be kind enough?" repeated Mr. Blyth, walking along the semi-circle of chairs, and politely offering his manuscript to anybody who would take it. Not a hand was held out. Bashfulness is frequently infectious; and it proved to be so on this occasion.

"Nonsense, Blyth!" exclaimed Lady Brambledown. "Read it yourself. Egotistical? Stuff! Everybody's egotistical. I hate modest men; they're rascals. Read it and assert your importance. You have a better right to do so than most of your neighbours, for you belong to the aristocracy of talent—the only aristocracy worth a straw." Here her ladyship took snuff, and looked at the middle-class families, as much as to say:—"There! what do you think of that from a member of your Peerage?"

Thus encouraged, Valentine took his station, wand in hand, beneath "Columbus," and unrolled the manuscript.

"What a very peculiar man Mr. Blyth is!" whispered one of the lady visitors to an acquaintance behind her.

"And what a very unusual mixture of people he seems to have asked!" rejoined the other, looking towards the doorway, where the democracy loomed diffident in Sunday clothes.

"The pictures I have the honour to exhibit," began Valentine from the manuscript, "have been painted on a principle —"

"I beg your pardon, Blyth," interrupted Lady Brambledown, whose sharp ears caught the remark made on Valentine and his "mixture of people," and whose liberal principles were thereby stimulated into publicly asserting themselves. "I beg your pardon; but where's my old ally, the gardener, who was here last time?—Out at the door is he? What does he mean by not coming in? Here, gardener! come behind my chair."

The gardener approached, internally writhing under the honour of public notice, and covered with confusion in consequence of the noise his boots made on the floor.

"How do you do? and how are your family? What did you stop at the door for? You're one of Mr. Blyth's guests, and have as much right inside as any of us. Stand there, and listen, and look about you, and inform your mind. This is an age of progress, gardener; your class is coming uppermost, and time it did too. Go on Blyth." And again the Dowager Countess took a pinch of snuff, looking contemptuously at the lady who had spoken of the "mixture of people."

"I take the liberty," continued Valentine, resuming the manuscript, "of dividing all art into two great classes, the landscape subjects, and the figure subjects; and I venture to describe these classes, in their highest development, under the respective titles of Art Pastoral and Art Mystic. The 'Golden Age' is an attempt to exemplify Art Pastoral. 'Columbus in Sight of the New World' is an effort to express myself in Art Mystic. In 'The Golden Age'—(everybody looked at Columbus immediately)—"In 'The Golden Age,'" continued Mr. Blyth, waving his hand persuasively towards the right picture, "you have, in the foreground, bushes, the middle-distance trees, the horizon mountains, and the superincumbent sky, what I would fain hope is a tolerably faithful transcript of mere nature. But in the group of buildings to the right" (here the wand touched the architectural city, with its acres of steps and forests of pillars), "in the dancing nymphs, and the musing philosopher." (Mr. Blyth rapped the philosopher fami-

liarily on the head with his wand), "you have the Ideal—the poetical view of ordinary objects, like cities, happy female peasants, and thoughtful spectators. Thus nature is exalted; and thus Art Pastoral—no!—thus Art Pastoral exalts—no! I beg your pardon—thus Art Pastoral and Nature exalt each other, and—I beg your pardon again!—in short, exalt each other—"

Here Valentine broke down, and the gardener made an abortive effort to get back to the doorway.

"Capital, Blyth!" cried Lady Brambledown. "Liberal, comprehensive, progressive, profound. Gardener, don't fidget!"

"The true philosophy of art, my lady," added Mr. Grimble, the picture-dealer.

"Crude?" said Mr. Hemlock to Mr. Bullivant.

"What?" inquired that gentleman.

"Blyth's principles of criticism," answered Mr. Hemlock.

"Oh, yes! extremely so," said Mr. Bullivant.

"Having glanced at Art Pastoral, as attempted in the 'Golden Age,' " pursued Valentine, turning over a leaf, "I will now, with your permission, proceed to Art Mystic and 'Columbus.' Art Mystic, I would briefly endeavour to define, as aiming at the illustration of fact on the highest imaginative principles. It takes a scene, for instance, from history, and represents that scene as exactly and naturally as possible. Besides the representation of the scene itself, the spirit of the age which produced that scene, must also be indicated, mystically, by the introduction of those angelic or infernal winged forms—those demons and dragons of darkness—which so many illustrious painters have taught us to recognise as impersonating the good and evil influences, Virtue and Vice, Glory and Shame, Success and Failure, Past and Future, Heaven and Earth—all on the same canvas." Here Mr. Blyth stopped again: this passage had cost him some trouble, and he was proud of having got smoothly to the end of it.

"Glorious!" cried enthusiastic Mr. Grimble.

"Turgid," muttered critical Mr. Hemlock.

"Very," assented compliant Mr. Bullivant.

"Go on—get to the picture—don't stop so often," said Lady Brambledown. "Bless my soul, how the man does fidget!" This was not directed at Valentine (who, however, richly deserved it), but at the unhappy gardener, who had made a second attempt to escape.

"The moment sought to be represented," proceeded Mr.

Blyth, "is sunrise on the 12th of October, 1492, when the great Columbus first saw land clearly at the end of his voyage. Observe, now, in the upper portions of the composition, how the spirit of the age is mystically developed before the spectator. Of the two winged female figures the first is the Spirit of Discovery, holding the orb of the world in her left hand, and pointing with a laurel crown towards the newly-discovered Continent. The other symbolises the Spirit of Royal Patronage, impersonated by Queen Isabella, who, throughout his perilous voyage, was with him in spirit. The tawny figure with feathered head, floating hair, and wildly-extended pinions, soaring upward from the western horizon, represents the Genius of America advancing to meet her great discoverer; while the shadowy countenances, looming dimly through the morning mist behind her, are portrait-types of Washington and Franklin.

"Let me now ask your attention," resumed Valentine, "to the same mystic style of treatment, as carried from the sky into the sea. Writhing defeated behind Columbus's ship, in the depths of the Atlantic, you have types of the difficulties and enemies the dauntless navigator had to contend with. Crushed headlong into the waters, sinks first the Spirit of Superstition. Behind the Spirit of Superstition, and impersonated by a fillet of purple grapes around her head, descends the Genius of Portugal—the Portuguese having repulsed Columbus, and having sent out frigates to stop his discovery. The scaly forms entwined around these two, represent Envy, Hatred, Malice, Ignorance, and Crime generally; and thus the mystic element is, so to speak, led through the sea out of the picture."

"All that now remains to be noticed," continued Mr. Blyth, "is the central portion of the composition, which represents the scene as it may actually be supposed to have occurred. Here we get to Reality, and to that sort of correctly-imitative art which is simple enough to explain itself. As a proof of this, let me point attention to Columbus himself. Weeks of the most laborious consultation of authorities of which the artist is capable, have been expended over the impersonation of that one figure—expended, I would say, in obtaining that faithful representation of individual character, which it is my earnest desire to combine with the higher element. One instance of this fidelity to Nature I may perhaps be permitted to point out in the person of Columbus. Pray observe him, and oblige me, by

inspecting his outstretched arms. Let me remind you that this great man went to sea at the age of fourteen, and cast himself freely into all the hardships of nautical life; and, let me direct your attention to the manner in which the muscular system of the famous navigator is developed about the arms in harmony with this idea. Follow the wand and observe, bursting, as it were, through his sleeves, the characteristic vigour of Columbus's Biceps Flexor Cubiti—"

"Mercy on us! what's that?" cried Lady Brambledown. "Anything improper?"

"The Biceps Flexor Cubiti, your ladyship," began the Doctor, "may be literally interpreted as the Two-Headed Bender of the Elbow, and is a muscle."

"Follow the wand, my dear madam, pray follow the wand! This is the Biceps," interrupted Valentine, tapping till the canvas quivered again on the upper part of Columbus's arms, which obtruded their muscular condition through a pair of tight-fitting chamoy leather sleeves. "The Biceps, Lady Brambledown, is a tremendously strong muscle—"

"Which arises in the human body, your Ladyship," interposed the Doctor, "by two heads—"

"Which is used," continued Valentine, "I beg your pardon, Doctor, which is used—"

"I beg yours," rejoined the Doctor, testily. "The origin of the muscle is the first thing. The use comes afterwards."

"But, my dear sir!" cried Valentine—

"No," said the Doctor, peremptorily, "you must excuse me. This is a professional point. If I allow erroneous explanations—"

"I don't want to make any!" cried Mr. Blyth, gesticulating violently in the direction of Columbus. "Will you let me say two words?"

"Two hundred thousand, on any other subject," assented the Doctor, "but on this subject—"

"On art?" shouted Mr. Blyth. "I only want to say that, as Columbus's early life must have exercised him considerably in hauling ropes and pulling oars, I have shown the large development of his Biceps through his sleeves, as a good characteristic point in his physical formation.—That's all! As to the origin—"

"The origin of the Biceps Flexor Cubiti, your Ladyship," re-

sumed the pertinacious Doctor, "is by two heads. The first begins from the glenoid cavity of the scapula—"

"That man is a pedantic jackass," whispered Mr. Hemlock.

"And yet he hasn't a bad head for a bust!" rejoined Mr. Bullivant.

"Pray, Mr. Blyth," pleaded the ever-admiring Mr. Gimble, "proceed with your most interesting views on art!"

"Indeed, Mr. Gimble," said Valentine, a little crest-fallen under the anatomical castigation inflicted on him by the Doctor, "I am very much gratified by your approval; but I have nothing more to read. I thought that point about Columbus a good point to leave off with, and considered I might allow the rest of the picture to explain itself."

Hearing this, some of the spectators, evidently distrusting their own intelligence, rose to take leave. Meanwhile, through all the bustle of departing and arriving friends, and through all the fast-strengthening hum of general talk, the voice of the unyielding doctor still murmured solemnly of "capsular ligaments," "adjacent tendons," and "corracoid processes" to Lady Brambledown, who listened to him with satirical curiosity.

Among the next applicants for admission at the painting-room door were two whom Valentine had expected to see at a much earlier period of the day—Mr. Matthew Marksman and Zack.

"How late you are!" he said, as he shook hands with young Thorpe.

"I wish I could have come earlier, my dear fellow," answered Zack, rather importantly; "but I had some business to do" (he had been recovering his watch from the pawnbroker); "and my friend here had some business to do also. Mat, let me introduce you. This is my old friend, Mr. Blyth, whom I told you of."

Valentine had barely time to take the hand of the new guest before his attention was claimed by fresh visitors. My friend's a great genius," whispered Zack, wondering, as he spoke, whether the scene of civilised life now displayed before Mr. Marksman would at all tend to upset his barbarian self-possession.

No: not in the least. There stood Mat, just as grave, cool, and quietly observant as ever. Neither the pictures, nor the company, nor the staring of many eyes were capable of disturbing the serenity of this Jupiter of the back-woods.

"There!" cried Zack, pointing across the room to 'Columbus.' "Cudgel your brains, old boy, and guess what that is a picture of, without coming to me to help you."

Mat surveyed the figure of Columbus, the rig of his ship, and the wings of the female spirits, hovering overhead—thought a little—then answered:—

"Peter Wilkins taking a voyage with his flying wives."

Zack stifled his laughter as well as he could, out of consideration for Mat, who, however, took not the smallest notice of him, but added, still staring at the picture:—

"Peter Wilkins was the only book I had, when I was a lad aboard ship. I used to read it over and over again, till I pretty nigh got it by heart. That was many a year ago. But, mind ye, it's my belief that Peter Wilkins was something of a sailor."

"Well?" whispered Zack, humouring him, "suppose he was?"

"Do you think a man as was anything of a sailor would ever be fool enough to put to sea in such a craft as that?" asked Mr. Marksman, pointing scornfully to Columbus's ship.

"Hush! old Rough and Tough; the picture hasn't anything to do with Peter Wilkins," said Zack. "Wait here a minute for me. There are some friends of mine that I must speak to. And if Blyth comes up to you and asks you about the picture, say it's Columbus, and remarkably like him."

Left by himself, Mat looked about for better standing-room than he then happened to occupy; and seeing a vacant space left between the door-post and Mr. Blyth's bureau, retreated to it. It was not long, however, before he was disturbed. One of his neighbours, seeing his back was against a large paper sketch on the wall, told him bluntly that he was doing mischief there. He moved accordingly to the door-post; but even here he was not left in repose. A fresh relay of visitors arrived, and obliged him to make way for them, which he did by rolling himself round the door-post into the passage.

As he disappeared, Mr. Blyth bustled up to the place where Mat had been standing, and received his guests there, with great cordiality, but with some appearance of perplexity of mind. The fact was, that Lady Brambledown had just remembered that she had not examined Valentine's works yet, through one of those artistic tubes which concentrate the rays of light on a picture. Valentine promised to get it, but he had not the slightest idea where it actually was.

It was not to be found in the bottom of the bureau. He next looked, after a little preliminary hesitation, into a long narrow drawer opening beneath some pigeon-hole recesses at the back.

The tube was not there, either; and he shut the drawer to again—for inside it was the Hair Bracelet that had belonged to Madonna's mother. Just as he closed the drawer, he heard footsteps at his right hand, and turned in that direction—locking down the lid of the bureau as he looked round. It was only Mr. Gimble, wanting to know what Mr. Blyth was searching for. Valentine mentioned the loss of the tube; and Mr. Gimble immediately volunteered to make one of pasteboard.

If, instead of turning to the right hand to speak to Mr. Gimble, Valentine had turned to the left, he would have seen that, just as he opened the bureau, Mr. Marksman finding the way into the painting-room clear once more, had rolled himself quietly round the door-post again; and had then, just as quietly, bent forward a little, so as to look sideways into the bureau with those observant eyes of his. Little did Mr. Blyth think, as he walked away, talking with Mr. Gimble, that Zack's strange friend had seen as much of the inside of the bureau as he had seen of it himself.

"He shut up his big box uncommon sharp, when that smilin' little chap come near him," thought Mat. "And yet there didn't seem nothing in it that strangers mightn't see. There wasn't no money there—at least none that I set eyes on.

In the affairs of art, important discoveries are sometimes made by very ignoble agencies. Mat's ignorance of Painting in general, and gross misunderstanding of the subject represented by Columbus in particular, seemed to mark him out as the last man in the world who could possibly be associated with Art Mystic in the character of guardian genius. Yet such was the proud position which he was now selected by Fate to occupy. In plain words, Mr. Blyth's greatest historical work had been for some little time in imminent danger of destruction by falling; and Mat's "look at the picter," was the all-important look which enabled him to be the first person in the room who perceived that it was in peril.

The eye with which Mr. Marksman now regarded the picture was certainly the eye of a barbarian; but of a good practical carpenter to boot. He saw directly, that one of the two iron clamps to which the frame-lines of "Columbus" were attached,

had been carelessly driven into a part of the wall that was not strong enough to hold it against the downward stress of the frame.

"Just let me by, will you?" said Mat to some of his neighbours. "I want to stop those flying women and the man in the crank ship from coming down by the long run."

Dozens of alarmed ladies and gentlemen started up from their chairs. Mat pushed through them unceremoniously; and was indebted to his want of politeness for being in time to save the picture. With a grating crack, the loose clamp came clean out of the wall, just as Mat seized the unsupported end and side of the frame in his sturdy hands, and so prevented the picture from taking the fatal swing downwards, which would have infallibly torn it from the remaining fastening, and precipitated it on the chairs beneath.

A prodigious confusion and clamouring of tongues ensued; Mr. Blyth being louder, and more utterly useless in the emergency than any. Mat, cool as ever, kept his hold of the picture; and, called to Zack to fetch a ladder, or, failing that, to "get a hoist" on some chairs, and cut the rope from the clamp that remained firm. Wooden steps, were usually kept in the painting-room. Where had they been removed to now? Zack made a speculative dash at the flowing draperies which concealed the lumber in one corner, and dragged out the steps.

"All right; take your time, young 'un: there's a knife in my left-hand breeches' pocket," said Mat. "Now then, cut away at that bit of rope's-end, and hold on tight at top, while I lower away at bottom. Steady! Take it easy, and—there you are!" With which words, the guardian genius left Art-Mystic resting on the floor, and began to shake his coat-tails free of the plaster.

"My dear sir! you have saved the finest picture I ever painted," cried Valentine. "I can't find words to express my gratitude and admiration—"

"Don't worry yourself about that," answered Mat; "I don't suppose I should understand you if you could find 'em. If you want the picter put up again, I'll do it."

At the first alarm of danger, all the ladies—headed by the Dowager Countess, had got as far away as they could from the falling picture, before they ventured to look round. Just as this had been accomplished, Lady Brambledown caught sight of Madonna in the passage. Mrs. Blyth had heard the noise and

confusion downstairs, and had sent Madonna to find out what had happened.

While descending the stairs the girl had anticipated that they might easily discover whether anything was amiss, by merely peeping through the studio door. But all chance of escaping the ordeal of the painting-room was lost the moment Lady Brambledown set eyes on her. The Dowager Countess was one of Madonna's warmest admirers; and now expressed that admiration by pouncing on her with immense affection and enthusiasm. Other people, to whom the deaf and dumb girl was a much more interesting sight than "Columbus," or the "Golden Age," crowded round her; all trying together, with great amiability to explain what had happened. Fortunately for Madonna, Zack happened to look towards her, over the ladies' heads, and came directly to explain the danger from which "Columbus" had escaped. She tried hard to get away, and bear the intelligence to Mrs. Blyth; but Lady Brambledown, feeling amiably unwilling to resign her too soon, pitched on the engraver as being quite clever enough to carry a message up-stairs, and sent him off to take the news to his daughter.

Thus it was that when Mr. Blyth left Zack's friend to see what was going on near the door, he found Madonna surrounded by sympathising and admiring ladies. The first words of explanation reminded him of the anxiety and alarm that his wife must have suffered; and he ran up-stairs, promising to be back again in a minute or two.

Mat followed Valentine to the group at the door-way—carelessly looked over some ladies' bonnets—and saw Madonna offering her slate to the Dowager Countess.

The gentleness and youthful softness of the girl's face, looked inexpressibly lovely, as she now stood shy and confused under the eager eyes that were gazing on her. Her dress, too, had never more powerfully aided the attractions of her face and figure than now, when the plain grey merino gown, and neat little black silk apron which she always wore, were contrasted with the frippery of fine colours shining all around her. Was the rough Mr. Marksman himself lured into acknowledging her influence? If he was, his face and manner showed it very strangely.

Almost at the instant when his eyes fell on her, that clay-cold change which had altered the colour of his swarthy cheeks in the hosier's shop at Dibbledean, passed over them again. The first

amazed look that he cast on her, slowly darkened into a fixed, heavy, stare of superstitious awe. He hardly seemed to breathe, until the head of a person before him intercepted his view. Then he stepped back a few paces, looked about him bewildered, and turned quickly towards the door, as if resolved to leave the room.

But there was some inexplicable influence at work that drew him back. He retraced his steps to the group round Madonna—looked at her once more—and, from that moment, never lost sight of her till she went up-stairs again. When Valentine reappeared in the studio, and Madonna besought him by a look, to set her free, Mat was watching her over the painter's shoulder. And when young Thorpe nodded to her as she left the room, his friend from the backwoods was close behind him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FINDING OF THE CLUE.

Mr. Blyth's visitors, now that their common centre of attraction had disappeared, either dispersed again in the painting-room or approached the door to take their departure. Zack, turning round sharply after Madonna had left the studio, encountered his queer companion, who had not stirred an inch while other people were all moving about him.

"In the name of wonder, what has come to you now? Are you ill? Have you hurt yourself with that picture?" asked Zack.

"Come out," said Mat.

"What's wrong?" asked Zack. No answer. They went along the passage and down to the garden gate, in silence. As soon as they had got into one of the lonely bye-roads of the new suburb, Mat stopped short; and, turning full on his companion, said: "Who is she?"

"She? Who do you mean?" enquired young Thorpe.

"I mean that young woman they were all staring at."

For a moment, Zack contemplated the anxiety visible in his friend's face, with an expression of blank astonishment; then burst into one of his loudest, heartiest, and longest fits of laughter. "Oh, by Jove, I wouldn't have missed this for fifty pounds. Here's old Rough and Tough smitten with the tender passion, like the rest of us! Blush, you brazen old beggar, blush! You've fallen in love with Madonna at first sight!"

"Damn your laughing! Tell me who she is."

"Tell you who she is? That's exactly what I can't do."

"Why not? What do you mean? Does she belong to that painter-man?"

"Oh, fie, Mat! You mustn't talk of a young lady belonging to anybody. Confound it man, don't shake me in that way! You'll pull my arm off. Let me have my laugh, and I'll tell you everything."

"Tell it then; and be quick about it."

"Well, first of all, she is not Blyth's daughter."

"Nor yet his wife?"

"Nor yet his wife. What a question! He adopted her years ago, when she was a child. But who she is, or where he picked her up, or what is her name, Blyth never has told anybody, and never will. She's the dearest, kindest, prettiest little soul that ever lived; and that's all I know about her."

Mat did not immediately answer. He paid the most breathless attention to the few words of information which Zack had given him—reflected—then said—

"Why won't the painter-man tell anybody who she is?"

"How should I know? It's a whim of his. And, I'll tell you what:—If you want to go there again, and make her acquaintance, don't you ask Blyth who she is, or let him fancy you want to know. He's touchy on that point. That's Blyth's raw place, and if you hit him on it, you won't get inside of his house again in a hurry."

Still, Mat's attention fastened greedily on every word—still, he repeated to himself what Zack was telling him.

"By the bye, I suppose you saw the poor dear little soul is deaf and dumb," young Thorpe continued. "She's been so from a child. Some accident; a fall, I believe. But it don't affect her spirits a bit. She's as happy as the day is long—that's one comfort."

"Deaf and dumb! So like her, it was a'most as awful as seeing the dead come to life. She had Mary's turn with her head; Mary's—poor creature! poor creature!" He whispered those words to himself, his face turned aside, with a vacantly anxious expression.

"Come! come! don't be getting into the dolefuls already," cried Zack. "Cheer up! We're all in love with her. I'll act the generous rival with you, brother Mat! You shall have the

benefit of my advice gratis. I don't think your own experience among the wild Indians will help you much, over here. Did you ever make love to a Squaw?"

"She isn't his wife; and she isn't his daughter; he won't say where he picked her up, or who she is." Repeating these words to himself, Mat did not appear to be listening to a single word that young Thorpe said. His mind was running now on one of the answers that he had wrested from Joanna Grice, at Dibbledean—the answer which had informed him that Mary's child had been born alive!

"Wake up, Mat! You shall have your fair chance with the lady, along with the rest of us. In the first place, always remember that you mustn't go beyond admiration at a respectful distance, to begin with. At the second interview, you may make amorous faces. At the third, you may get bold, and try her with a little present. Oh, by the bye, remember that the whole round of presents is open for you to choose from, except one; and that one is a Hair Bracelet."

Zack's laughter came to an abrupt termination. Mat had raised his head suddenly, and was now staring him in the face with a bright searching look—an expression in which amazement and curiosity were mingled together.

"You're not angry with me for cracking a few respectable old jokes?" said Zack. "Have I said anything?—Stop! yes, I have, though I didn't mean it. You looked up at me in that savage manner, when I warned you not to give her a Hair Bracelet. Surely you don't think me brute enough to make fun of your not having any hair on your head? I give you my word of honour, I never thought of you, or your head, or that infernal scalping business. It was true—it happened to me."

"How did it happen?" said Mat, with eager curiosity.

"Only in this way. I wanted to give her a Hair Bracelet myself—my hair and Blyth's, and so on. And an addle-headed old woman who seems to know Madonna as well as Blyth himself, got me into a corner, and talked nonsense about the whole thing."

"What did she say?" asked Mat, more curious than ever.

"She talked nonsense, I tell you. She said a Hair Bracelet would be unlucky to Madonna; and then told me Madonna had one already; and then wouldn't let me ask Blyth whether it was true, because I should get her into dreadful trouble if I said

anything to him about it. But I have told you enough—haven't I?—to show I was not thinking of you, when I said that just now. Come, shake hands, old fellow. You're not offended with me, now I've explained everything?"

Mat gave his hand, but he put it out like a man groping in the dark. His mind was full of that memorable letter about a Hair Bracelet, which he had found in the box given to him by Joanna Grice.

"A Hair Bracelet?" he said, vacantly.

"Don't be sulky!" cried Zack, clapping him on the shoulder.

"A Hair Bracelet is unlucky to the young woman—and she's got one already. What's it like?" he asked aloud.

"What's what like?"

"A Hair Bracelet."

"Still harping on that, after all my explanations! Like? Why it's hair plaited up, and made to fasten round the wrist, with gold at each end to clasp it by. I'll tell you what, Mat, I can make every allowance for a man in your situation; but if I didn't know how you had been spending the morning, I should say you were drunk."

They had been walking along quickly, while Mat asked what a Hair Bracelet was like. But no sooner had Zack told him than he came to a dead pause. The information had recalled to him a certain object that he had seen in the drawer of Mr. Blyth's bureau; and the resemblance between the two had at once flashed upon him. The importance which this discovery assumed in his eyes may be easily estimated, when it is remembered that his barbarian life had kept him ignorant that a Hair Bracelet is in England one of the commonest ornaments of woman's wear.

"Are we going to stop here all day?" asked Zack. "If you're turning from sulky to sentimental again, I shall go back to Blyth's, and pave the way for you with Madonna, old boy!"

Mat did not offer to detain him. "I'm sober," he said vacantly to himself; "I'm not dreaming; I'm not light-headed, though I feel a'most like it. I saw that young woman as plain as I see them houses in front of me now; and by God, if she had been Mary's ghost, she couldn't have been more like her!"

He stopped. Recollections that had slumbered for years past, were awakening again to life. Through the obscurity of long absence, through the darkness of the tomb, there was shin-

ing out now, on his memory, the image of the dead woman whose name was "Mary." And it was only the sight of that shy, gentle, deaf and dumb creature, that had wrought the miracle!

He tried to shake himself clear of the influences which were now at work on him. He moved forward a step or two, and looked up. Zack?—where was Zack?

Without knowing why he did so, Mat turned instantly, and walked after him, calling to him to come back.

"Well!" cried Zack, speaking as he came on. "Well, Cupid! what do you want with me now?"

Mat did not immediately answer. His thoughts were still pondering on that little circle of plaited hair, having gold at each end, and looking just big enough to go round a woman's wrist, which he had seen in the drawer of Mr. Blyth's bureau. And once again, the identity between this object and the ornament which young Thorpe had described as a Hair Bracelet, began to establish itself in his mind.

"Now then, don't keep me waiting," continued Zack, laughing; "clap your hand on your heart, and give me your tender message for the future Mrs. Marksman."

"What's the young woman's real name?" he asked carelessly, just as Zack was beginning to banter him for the third time.

"Is that all you called me back for? Her real name's Mary."

Mat had made his inquiry with the air of a man whose thoughts were far away from his words. Zack's reply to his question startled him into instant and anxious attention.

"Mary!" he repeated. "What else, besides Mary?"

"How should I know? Didn't I try and beat it into your muddled old head, half-an-hour ago, that Blyth won't tell his friends anything about her?"

There was another pause. The secrecy in which Mr. Blyth chose to conceal Madonna's history, and the sequestered place where he kept the Hair Bracelet, began vaguely to connect themselves together in Mat's mind. A curious smile hovered about his lips, and the cunning look brightened in his eyes. "The Painter-Man won't tell anything about her, won't he? Perhaps that thing in his drawer will." He muttered the words to himself, mechanically kicking away a stone which happened to lie at his feet.

"What are you grumbling about now?" asked Zack. "Do you think I'm going to stop here all day for the pleasure of hear-

ing you talk to yourself? Trust me to pave the way for you with Madonna!"

"Trust me to have another look at your friend's Hair Bracelet," said Mat quietly to himself.

He nodded over his shoulder at Zack, and walked away quickly in the direction of Kirk Street.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOX OF LETTERS.

The first thing Mat did when he got to his lodgings, was to fill and light his pipe. He then sat down on his bear-skins, and dragged the box close to him which he had brought from Dibbledean.

Many a pipe did he empty and fill again, many a dark change passed over his heavy features, as he pondered long and laboriously over every word of the dialogue that had just been held between himself and Zack. But not so much as five minutes out of all the time he thus consumed was time wasted. He had sat down to his first pipe, resolved that he would find out how the young girl whom he had seen in Mr. Blyth's studio, had first come there, and who she really was. When he rose up at last, and put the pipe away to cool, he had thought the matter fairly out, had arrived at his conclusions, and had settled his future plans.

A Hair Bracelet (easily recognisable if still in existence, by comparing it with the hair enclosed in Jane Holdsworth's note) had once been the property of Mary Grice. According to what Zack had said, there was apparently some incomprehensible confusion and mystery in connection with a Hair Bracelet and the young woman whose extraordinary likeness to Mary Grice had first suggested to him the purpose he was now pursuing. Lastly, according to what he himself now knew, there was actually a Hair Bracelet lying in the drawer of Mr. Blyth's bureau.

Vague as they might be, these coincidences were sufficient to startle him—then to fill him with an eager curiosity—and then to suggest to him the course which he was now resolved to follow. How he was to gain possession of the Hair Bracelet he had not yet determined. But he was resolved to have it, he was perfectly unscrupulous as to means, and he felt certain of attaining his object. Whither, or to what excesses, that object

might lead him, he never stopped to consider. The awful face of the dead woman seemed to be driving him on swiftly into unknown darkness, to bring him out into unexpected light at the end.

His resolution in reference to the Hair Bracelet was not more settled than his resolution to keep his real sensations on seeing Madonna, and the purpose which had grown out of them, a secret from young Thorpe, who was too warmly Mr. Blyth's friend to be trusted. Every word that Zack had let slip had been of vital importance, hitherto; every word that might yet escape him, might be of the most precious use. "If it's his fancy," mused Mat, "to go on thinking I'm sweet on the girl, let him think it. The more he thinks, the more he'll talk."

While schooling himself thus as to his conduct towards Zack, he did not forget another person who might also be turned to good account. Before he decided on his plan of action, he debated the propriety of returning to Dibbledean, and forcing from the old woman, Joanna Grice, more information than she had been willing to give him at their first interview. But, on reflection, he considered that it was better to leave this as a resource to be tried, in case of the failure of his first experiment with the Hair Bracelet. One look at that—one close comparison of the hair it was made of, with the surplus hair which had not been used by the jeweller, and which had been returned to her, was all he wanted in the first place; for this would be enough to clear up every uncertainty and suspicion connected with the ornament in Mr. Blyth's bureau.

These were the resolutions to which his long meditation had now conducted him. His next business was to examine those letters in the box, which he had hitherto not opened; and also to possess himself of the enclosure of hair, in the letter to "Mary Grice," so that he might have it always about him ready for any emergency.

Before he opened the box, however, he took a quick, impatient turn or two up and down his miserable little room. Not once, since he had set forth to return to his own country, and to the civilisation from which, for more than twenty years, he had been an outcast, had he felt that he was "his own man again," until now. "It goes through and through me, a'most like dodging for life again among the bloody Indians," muttered Mat to himself, as he trod restlessly to and fro in his cage of a room.

Mat's face had grown suddenly swarthier than ever, while he walked across his room. It altered again, though, in a minute or two, and turned once more to the cold clay-colour which had overspread it in the hosier's shop at Dibbledean, as he returned to his bear-skins and opened the box that had belonged to "Mary Grice."

He took out first the letter with the enclosure of hair, and placed it carefully in the breast pocket of his coat. He next searched for the letter signed by Joanna Grice; and, having found it, placed it on one side of him, on the floor. After this he paused a moment, looking into the box with a curious, scowling sadness on his face; while his hand vacantly stirred hither and thither the different objects that lay about among the papers—the gaily-bound album, the lace-collar, the dried flower-leaves, and the other little womanly possessions which had once belonged to Mary Grice.

Then he began to collect all the letters. Having got them into his hands—some tied up in a packet, some loose—he spread them out before him on his lap. He began by examining the addresses. They were all directed to "Mary Grice," in the same clear, careful, handwriting. Though they were letters in form, they proved to be only notes in substance, the writing, in some, not extending to more than four or five lines. At least fifteen or twenty were expressed, in this form:—

"My dearest Mary,—Pray try all you can to meet me to-morrow evening at the usual place. I have been waiting and longing for you in vain to-day. Only think of me, love, as I am now, and always, thinking of you; and I know you will come. Ever and only yours,

A. C."

All these notes were signed in the same way, merely with initial letters. They contained no date, except the day of the week, and they had evidently been delivered by some private means, for there did not appear to be a post-mark on any of them. One after another Mat opened and glanced at them—then tossed them aside into a heap.

Other letters, somewhat longer than the note already quoted, fared no better at his hands. But still, whether long or short, they bore no signature but the initials "A. C.;" still the dates afforded no information of the year, month, or place in which they had been written; and still Mat quickly tossed them aside without so much as a word or a sigh escaping him. Out of the

whole number of the letters, there were only two that he read more than once through, and then pondered over anxiously, before he threw them from him like the rest.

The first was expressed thus:—

“I shall bring the dried ferns and the passion flower for your album this evening. You cannot imagine, dearest, how happy and how vain I feel at having made you as enthusiastic a botanist as myself. Since you have taken an interest in my favourite pursuit, it has been more exquisitely delightful to me than any words can express. I believe that I never really knew how to touch tender leaves tenderly until now, when I gather them with the knowledge that they are all to be shown to you, and all to be placed in your dear hand.

“Do you know, my own love, I thought I detected an alteration in you yesterday evening? Your attention often wandered; and you looked at me once or twice quite strangely, Mary.—I mean strangely, because your colour seemed to be coming and going without any imaginable reason. I fancied, as I walked home, that you had something to say, and were afraid to say it. Surely, love, you can have no secrets from me!—But we shall meet to-night, and then you will tell me everything (will you not?). Farewell, dearest, till seven o’clock.”

Mat slowly read the second paragraph of this letter twice over. There was evidently something in the few lines that half-saddened, half perplexed, him. Whatever the difficulty was, he gave it up, and went on doggedly to the next letter, which was an exception to the rest of the collection, for it had a post-mark on it. He had failed to notice this, on looking at the outside; but he detected directly on glancing at the inside that it was dated differently from those which had gone before it. Under the day of the week was written the word “London”—noting which, he began to read the letter with some appearance of anxiety. It ran thus:—

“I write, my dearest love, in the greatest possible agitation and despair. All the hopes I felt that my absence would not last more than a few days, and that I should not be obliged to journey farther than London, have been frustrated. I am absolutely compelled to go to Germany, and may be away as long as three or four months. You see, I tell you the worst at once, Mary, because I know your courage and high spirit, and feel sure that you will bear up against this unforeseen parting, for

both our sakes. How glad I am that I gave you my hair for your Bracelet, and that I got yours in return! It will be such a consolation to us to have our keepsakes to look at now.

"If it only rested with me to go or not, no earthly consideration should induce me to take this journey. But the rights and interests of others are concerned in my setting forth; and I must, therefore, depart at the expense of my own happiness. I go this very day, and can only steal a few minutes to write to you. My pen hurries over the paper. I am so agitated that I hardly know what I am saying.

"If anything, dearest Mary, could add to my sense of the misfortune of being obliged to leave you, it would be the apprehension that I may have ignorantly offended you, or that something has happened which you don't like to tell me. Ever since I noticed, ten days ago, that little alteration in your manner, I have been afraid you had something on your mind. The last time we saw each other I thought you had been crying; and I am sure you looked away uneasily, whenever our eyes met. What is it? Do relieve my anxiety by telling me what it is in your first letter! The moment I get to the other side of the Channel, I will send you word where to direct to. I will write constantly—mind you write constantly, too. Love me, and remember me always, till I return, never, I hope, to leave you again.—A.C."

Over this letter Mat meditated long before he cast it away among the rest. When he had at last thrown it from him there remained only three more to examine. They proved to be notes of no consequence, and had been evidently written at an earlier period than the letters he had just read. That hurried letter, with its abrupt announcement of the writer's departure from England, was the last of the series!

After he had made this discovery, he sat for a little while vacantly gazing out of the window. His sense of the useless result to which the search he had been prosecuting had led him, thus far, seemed to have robbed him of half his energy already. He looked once or twice at the letter superscribed by Joanna Grice, mechanically reading along the line on the cover:—"Justification of my conduct towards my niece,"—but not attempting to examine what was written inside. It was only after a long interval of hesitation and delay that he at last roused himself, gathered up the letters, and thrusting them all back again together, into the box.

He listened carefully once or twice after he had shut down the lid to ascertain whether his wild young friend was opening the street door yet.

For the present there seemed to be no danger of interruption. He corded up the box at his leisure, concealed it in its accustomed place, took his brandy-bottle from the cupboard, opened Joanna Grice's letter—and still there was no sound of any one entering. Before he began to read, he drank some of the spirit from the neck of the bottle. Was there some inexplicable dread stealing over him at the mere prospect of examining the contents of this one solitary letter? It seemed as if there was. His finger trembled so, that he had to take a second dram to steady it. And when he at length fairly began the letter, he did not pursue his occupation either as quietly or as quickly as he had followed it before. Sometimes he read a line or two aloud, sometimes he overlooked several sentences, and went on to another part of the long narrative—with fierce outbursts of oaths, which he had picked up in the terrible swearing-school of the Californian gold mines. He began, however, with perfect regularity, at the proper part of the letter, sitting as near to the window as he could, so as to give himself the full benefit of all the light which still flowed into the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOANNA GRICE'S NARRATIVE.

“I intend this letter to be read after my death, and I purpose calling it plainly a Justification of my conduct towards my Niece. Not because I think my conduct wants any excuse—but because others, ignorant of my motives, may think that my actions want justifying, and may condemn me, unless I make some such statement in my own defence. There may still be living one member of my late brother's family, whose voice would, I feel sure, be raised against me for what I have done. It was in the April month of 1827 that the villain who was the ruin of my niece, and the dishonour of the once respectable family to which she belonged, first came to Dibbledean. He took the little four-room cottage called Jay's Cottage, which was then to be let furnished. He called himself Mr. Carr, and the few letters that came to him were directed to ‘Arthur Carr, Esq.’

"He was quite a young man,—I should say not more than four or five and twenty, rather effeminate looking, as I thought—for he wore his hair quite long over his shoulders, in the foreign way, and had a clear, soft complexion, almost like a woman's. Though he appeared to be a gentleman, he always kept out of the way of making acquaintances among the respectable families about Dibbledean. His own account of himself was, that he came to Jay's Cottage for quiet, and retirement, and study; but he was very reserved, and would let nobody make up to him until the miserable day when he and my brother Joshua, and then my niece Mary, all got acquainted together.

"Before I go on to anything else, I must say first, that Mr. Carr was what they call a botanist. He hired a gardener for the bit of ground round about Jay's Cottage; and the man told me once, that his master knew more about flowers and how to grow them than anybody he ever met with. Mr. Carr used to make little pictures, too, of flowers and leaves set together in patterns. These things were thought very odd amusements for a young man to take up with; but from all that I heard, he spent more time over his flowers and his botany than anything else.

"We had, at that time, the two best shops in Dibbledean. Joshua sold hosiery, and I carried on a good dress-making and general millinery business. One day Mr. Carr came in Joshua's shop, and wanted something which my brother had not got ready to hand. Joshua begged him to sit down for a few minutes; but Mr. Carr happened to look into the garden, which he could see very well through the window, and said that he would like to wait there, and look at the flowers. Joshua was only too glad to have his garden taken such notice of, by a gentleman who was a botanist; so he showed his customer in there, and then went up into the warehouse to look for what was wanted.

"My niece, Mary, worked in my part of the house, along with the other young women. The room they used to be in looked into the garden; and from the window my niece must have seen Mr. Carr, and must have slipped down stairs to peep at the strange gentleman—or, more likely, to make believe she was accidentally walking in the garden, and so get noticed by him. All I know is, that when I came up into the workroom and found she was not there, and looked out of the window, I saw her, and Joshua, and Mr. Carr all standing together on the grass plot,

the strange gentleman talking to her quite intimate, with a flower in his hand.

"I called out to her to come back to her work directly. She looked up at me, smiling in her bold impudent way, and said:— 'Father has told me I may stop and learn what this gentleman is so kind as to teach me about my geraniums.' After that, I could say nothing more before the stranger: but when he was gone, I went down to my brother Joshua and talked to him seriously, and warned him that she ought to be kept stricter, and never let to have her own way. But he put me off with careless, jesting words, which he learned to repent of bitterly afterwards.

"Joshua was as pious and respectable a man as ever lived: but it was his misfortune to be too easy-tempered, and too proud of his daughter. Having lost his wife, and his eldest boy and girl, he seemed so fond of Mary, that he could deny her nothing.

"I have said she was vain of her good looks, and bold, and flighty; and I must now add, that she was also hasty and passionate. But she had wheedling ways with her, and when I made complaints against her to her father, she always managed to get him to forgive her. She behaved, from the outset, as perversely towards me as usual, in respect to Mr. Carr. It had flattered her pride to be noticed and bowed to just as if she was a born lady, by a gentleman, and a customer at the shop. And the very same evening, at tea time, she undid before my face, the whole effect of the good advice I had been giving her father. What with jumping on his knee, kissing him, tying and untying his cravat, sticking flowers in his button-hole, and going on altogether more like a child than a grown-up young woman, she wheedled him into promising that he would take her next Sunday to see Mr. Carr's garden. I had tried my best, when I heard it, to persuade my brother not to accept the invitation and let her scrape acquaintance with a stranger under her father's own nose; but all that I could say was useless now. She had got the better of me, and when I put in my word, she had her bold laugh and her light answer ready to insult me with directly.

"On the Sunday, after church, they went to Mr. Carr's. Though my advice was set at defiance in this way, I determined to persevere in keeping a stricter watch over my niece than ever. It is some comfort to me, after all that has happened, to remember that I did my utmost to carry out this resolution. The

blame of our dishonour lies not at my door. I disliked and distrusted Mr. Carr from the very first; and I tried hard to make others as suspicious of him as I was. But all I could say, and all I could do, availed nothing against the cunning of my niece. Watch and restrain her as I might, she was sure—"

(Mat broke off abruptly in the middle of a sentence to strike a light. The brief day of winter was fast fading out—the coming darkness was deepening over the pages of Joanna Grice's narrative. When he had lit his candle, and had sat down to read again, he lost his place, and, not having patience to look for it carefully, went on at once with the first lines that happened to strike his eye.)

"Things were now come, then, to this pass, that I felt certain she was in the habit of meeting him in secret; and yet I could not prove it to my brother's satisfaction. To set other people to watch them, would only have been spreading through Dibledean the very scandal that I was most anxious to avoid. As for Joshua, his infatuation made him deaf to all that I could urge. He would see nothing suspicious in the fondness Mary had suddenly taken for Botany, and drawing flowers. Next to his blind trust in his daughter was his blind trust in this stranger, because the gentleman's manners were so quiet and kind, and because he sent us presents of expensive flowers. He would not authorise me to open Mary's letters, and he even told me once that I did not know how to make proper allowances for young people.

"Allowances! I knew my niece better, and my duty as one of an honest family better, than to make allowances for such conduct as hers. I kept the tightest hand over her that I could. I advised her, argued with her, warned her, told her in the plainest terms, that she should not deceive me—she or her gentleman! I was honest and open, and said I disapproved so strongly of the terms she kept up with Mr. Carr, that if ever it lay in my power to cut short their acquaintance, I would assuredly do it. I even told her plainly that if she once got into mischief, it would then be too late to reclaim her; and she answered in her reckless way, that if she ever did get into mischief it would be nothing but my aggravation that would drive her to it; and that she believed her father's kindness would never find it too late to reclaim her again."

(As he finished this paragraph, Mat dashed the letter down angrily on his knee, and cursed the writer of it with some of

those gold-digger's imprecations which it had been his misfortune to hear, but too often in the past days of his Californian wanderings. However, he spread it out flat before him once more—hesitated—and then turned over the leaf of paper before him, and began at a new page.)

“When I told Joshua generally what I had observed, and heard on the evening in question, he seemed at last a little staggered, and sent for my niece, to insist on an explanation. She flung her arms round his neck, burst out sobbing and crying, till she had a sort of fit. I was not at all sure that this might not be one of her tricks; but it frightened her father so that he forgot himself, and threw all the blame on me, and said my prudery and conspiring had tormented and frightened the poor girl out of her wits. After being insulted in this way, of course the only thing I could do was to leave the room, and let her have it all her own way with him.

“It was now the middle of September; and I was at my wit's end to know what I ought to think and do next—when Mr. Carr left Dibbledean. He had been away once or twice before, in the summer, but only for a day or two at a time. On this occasion, my niece received a letter from him. I thought this looked like a longer absence than usual, and determined to take advantage of it to try if I could not break off the intimacy between them.

“I must solemnly declare, that in spite of all I had seen and all I suspected for these many months, I had not the most distant idea of the wickedness that had really been committed. I only believed that the course she was taking might be fatal to her at some future day; and, acting on that belief, I thought myself justified in using any means in my power to stop her in time. I therefore resolved that if Mr. Carr wrote again, she should get none of his letters; and I knew her well enough to know that if she could once be brought to think herself neglected she would break off all intercourse with him.

“I thought myself perfectly justified in taking these measures. On that head my conscience is quite easy. I cannot mention what the plan was that I now adopted, without seriously compromising a living person. All I can say is, that every letter from Mr. Carr to our house, passed into my hands only, and was committed to the flames unread. These letters were at first all for my niece; but towards the end of the year two came, at dif-

ferent intervals, directed to my brother. I distrusted the cunning of the writer, and I put both those letters into the fire, unread like the rest. After that, no more came; and Mr. Carr never returned to Jay's Cottage. I never afterwards saw, and only once heard of the man who tempted my niece to commit the deadly sin which was her ruin in this world, and will be her ruin in the next.

"I must return first, however, to what happened from my burning of the letters. When my niece found that week after week passed, and she never heard from Mr. Carr, she fretted about it much more than I had fancied she would. And Joshua unthinkingly made her worse by wondering, in her presence, at the long absence of the gentleman of Jay's Cottage. He had been in the habit of going on certain evenings to Mr. Carr's to fetch the London paper, to take back drawings of flowers, and to let my niece bring away new ones to copy. And now, he fidgeted, and was restless, at not taking his usual walks to Jay's Cottage. This, as I have said, made his daughter worse. She fretted and cried in secret till she grew to be quite altered. All this time, she led me as miserable a life as she could; provoking and thwarting and insulting me at every opportunity. I believe she suspected me in the matter of the letters. But I had taken my measures so as to make discovery impossible.

"At last, as the winter drew on, she altered so much, and got such a strange look in her face, which never seemed to leave it, that Joshua became alarmed, and said he must send for the doctor. She seemed to be frightened out of her wits at the mere thought of it; and declared that she had no want of a doctor, and would see none, not even if her father himself insisted on it.

"This astonished me as well as Joshua; and when he asked me privately what I thought was the matter with her, I was obliged of course to tell him the truth, and say I believed she was out of her mind with love for Mr. Carr. For the first time in his life, my brother flew into a violent rage with me. I suspect he was furious with his own conscience for reminding him, at it must have done then, how over-indulgent he had been towards her, and how carelessly he had allowed her as well as himself, to get acquainted with a person out of her station. I said nothing of this to him: he was not fit to listen to it—and still less fit, even had I been willing to confide it to him, to hear

what the plan was which I had adopted for working her cure.

"As the weeks went on, and she still fretted in secret, and looked unlike herself, I began to doubt whether this plan, from which I had hoped so much, would succeed. I was sorely distressed, at times, as to what I ought to do next; and began to feel the difficulty getting too much for me, just when it was drawing on fast to its shameful end. We were then close upon Christmas. Joshua had got his shop-bills well forward for sending out, and was gone to London on business, as was customary at this season of the year. I expected him back a day or two before Christmas Day.

"For a while past, I had noticed some change in my niece. Ever since my brother had talked about sending for the doctor, she had altered a little, in the way of going on more regularly with her work, and pretending that there was nothing ailed her; her object being to make her father easier about her. The change, however, to which I now refer, was of another sort, and only affected her manner towards me, and her manner of dressing. When we were alone, now, I found her conduct quite altered. She spoke soft to me, and looked humble, and did what work I set her without idleness; and once, even made as if she wanted to kiss me. But I was on my guard—suspecting that she wanted to entrap me into letting out something about Mr. Carr's having written, and my having burned his letters. It was at this time also, and a little before it, that I noticed the alteration in her dress. She fell into wearing her things in a slovenly way, and sitting at home in her shawl, on account of feeling cold, she said, when I reprimanded her for untidyness.

"I don't know how long things might have lasted like this, or what the end might have been if events had gone on in their own way. But the dreadful truth made itself known at last suddenly. She had a quarrel with one of the young women in the dressmaking-room, named Ellen Gough, about a disreputable friend, one Jane Holdsworth, whom I had dismissed for impertinence. Ellen Gough having, it seems, been provoked by something my niece said, came to me in a passion, and in so many words told me the awful truth, that my brother's only daughter had disgraced herself and her family. The horror of that moment is present to me now, at this distance of time. The shock I then received struck me down; I never have recovered from it, and I never shall.

"In the first distraction, I must have done or said something down stairs, where I was, which must have warned the wretch in the room above that I had discovered her infamy. I remember going to her bed-chamber, and finding the door locked, and hearing her refuse to open it. After that, I must have fainted, for I found myself in the work-room, and Ellen Gough giving me a bottle to smell. With her help, I got into my own room; and there I fainted again.

"When I came to, I went once more to my niece's bed-chamber. The door was open; and there was a paper on the looking-glass directed to Joshua. She was gone from the honest house that her sin had defiled—gone for ever. She had written only a few scrawled lines to her father, but in them was acknowledgement of her crime, and a confession that it was the villain Carr who had caused her to commit it. She said she was gone to take her shame from our doors. She entreated that no attempt might be made to trace her, for she would die rather than return to disgrace her family, and her father in his old age. After this came some lines, which seemed to have been added, on second thoughts, to what went before. I do not remember the words; but the sense referred, shamelessly enough as I thought, to the child that was afterwards born, and to her resolution, if it came into the world alive, to suffer all things for its sake.

"It was some relief to know that she was gone. The dreadful exposure that threatened us, seemed delayed by her absence. On questioning Ellen Gough, I found that the other two young women who worked under me, and who were providentially absent on a Christmas visit, were not acquainted with my niece's infamous secret. Ellen had accidentally discovered it; and she had been obliged to confess to Ellen, and trust her. Everybody else in the house had been as successfully deceived as I had been. When I heard this, I began to have hope that our family disgrace might remain unknown.

"I wrote to my brother, not telling him what had happened, but begging him to come back instantly. It was the bitterest part of all the misery I suffered, to think of what I had now to tell Joshua, and of what dreadful extremities his daughter's ruin might drive him to. I strove to prepare myself for the time of coming trial; but what took place was worse than my worst forebodings.

"When my brother heard the shocking news, and saw the scrawled paper she had left for him, he spoke and acted as if he was out of his mind. It was only charitable, only fair to his previous character, to believe, as I then believed, that distress had actually driven him, for the time, out of his senses. He declared that he would go instantly and search for her, and set others seeking for her too. He said that he would bring her home the moment he found her; that he would succour her in her misery, and accept her penitence, and shelter her under his roof, without so much as giving a thought to the disgrace that her infamous situation would inflict on her family. He even wrested Scripture from its meaning to support him in what he said, and in what he was determined to do. And the moment he heard how it was that I had discovered his daughter's crime, he insisted that Ellen Gough should be turned out of the house: he declared, in such awful language as I had never believed it possible he could utter, that she should not sleep under his roof that night. It was hopeless to attempt to appease him. He put her out at the door that very day. She was an excellent work-woman, but revengeful when her temper was roused. By the next morning our disgrace was known all over Dibbledean.

"There was only one more degradation now to be dreaded; and that sickened me to think of. I knew Joshua well enough to know that if he found the wretch he was going in search of, he would bring her home again. I had been born in our house at Dibbledean; my mother before me had been born there; our family had lived in the old place, without so much as a breath of ill report breathing over them, for generations. When I thought of this, and then thought of the possibility that an abandoned woman might soon be admitted, and a bastard child born, in the house where so many of my relations had lived virtuously and died righteously, I resolved that the day when she set her foot on our threshold, should be the day when I left my home and my birthplace for ever.

"While I was in this mind, Joshua came to me—as determined in his way as I secretly was in mine—to ask if I had any suspicions about what direction she had taken. All the enquiries after her that he had made in Dibbledean, had given him no information. I said I had no positive knowledge (which was true), but told him I suspected she was gone to London, because I believed she was gone to look after Mr. Carr; and that I re-

membered his letter to her (the one only she received) had a London post-mark upon it. We could not find this letter at the time: the hiding-place she had for it, and for all the others she left behind her, was not discovered till years after, when the house was repaired for the people who bought our business. Joshua, however, having nothing better to guide him, and being resolved to begin seeking at once, said my suspicion was a likely one; and went away to London that night, to see what he could do, and to get advice from his lawyers about how to trace her.

"This, which I have been just relating, is the only part of my conduct, in the time of our calamity, which I now think of with an uneasy conscience. When I told Joshua I suspected she was gone to London I was not telling him the truth. I knew nothing certainly about where she was gone; but I did suspect that she had turned her steps in the contrary direction to London—that is to say, far out Bangbury way. She had been constantly asking all sorts of questions of Ellen Gough, who told me of it, about roads, and towns, and people in that part of the country: and this was my only reason for thinking she had taken herself in that direction. Though it was but a matter of suspicion at the best, still I deceived my brother as to my real opinion when he asked it of me: and this was a sin which I now truly repent of. But the thought of helping him to bring our infamy home to our doors, by actually bringing his degraded daughter back with him, in the face of the whole town—this thought was too much for me. I believed that the day when she crossed our threshold again would be the day of my death, as well as the day of my farewell to home; and under that conviction I concealed from Joshua my real opinion.

"I deserved to suffer for this; and I did suffer.

"Two or three days after the Christmas Day that I passed in utter solitude at our house in Dibbledean, I received a letter from Joshua's lawyer in London, telling me to come and see my brother immediately, for he was dangerously ill. In the course of his enquiries (which he would pursue himself, although the lawyers, who knew better what ought to be done, were doing their utmost to help him), he had been misled by false information, and had been robbed in some place near the river, and then turned out at night in a storm of snow. It is useless now to write about what I suffered from this fresh blow, or to speak of the awful time I passed by his bed-side in London. Let it

be enough to say, that he escaped out of the very jaws of death ; and that it was the end of February before he was well enough to be taken home.

"He soon got better in his own air—better as to his body, but his mind was in a sad way. Every morning he used to ask if any news had come? and when he heard there was none, he used to sigh, and then hardly hold up his head for the rest of the day. At one time, he showed a little anxiety about a letter reaching its destination ; peevishly refusing to mention to me the address on it. But I guessed who it had been sent to, when his lawyers told me that he had written it in London, and had mentioned that it was going to some place beyond the seas. He soon seemed to forget this though, and to forget everything, except his regular question about Mary, which he sometimes repeated in his dazed condition, even after I had broken it to him that she was dead.

"The news of her death came in the March month of the new year.

"All inquiries had failed up to that time in discovering trace of her. In Dibbledean we knew she could not be ; and elsewhere Joshua was now in no state to search himself, or to have any clear notions of instructing others in what direction to make inquiries. But in March, I saw in the Bangbury paper an advertisement calling on the friends of a young woman who had just died and left behind her an infant, to come forward and identify the body, and take steps in respect to the child. The description did not admit of a doubt, to any one that knew her, that the young woman referred to was my niece. My brother was in no condition to be spoken to, so I determined to act for myself. I sent by a person I could depend upon, money enough to bury her decently, putting no name or date to my letter. There was no law to oblige me to do more, and more I was determined not to do. As to the child, that was the offspring of her sin ; it was the infamous father's business to support it, not mine.

"I believed that I had now suffered the last of the many bitter trials which had assailed me as the consequences of my niece's guilt : I was mistaken : the cup of my affliction was not full. One day, hardly a fortnight after I had sent the burial money to Bangbury, our servant said there was a stranger at the door who wished to see my brother, and was so bent on it that

he would take no denial. I went down, and found waiting on the door-steps a respectable-looking, middle-aged man, whom I had never set eyes on before in my life.

"I told him that I was Joshua's sister, and that I managed my brother's affairs for him in the present state of his health. The stranger only answered, that he was very anxious to see Joshua himself. I did not choose to expose the helpless condition into which my brother's intellects had fallen, to a person of whom I knew nothing; so I merely said, the interview he wanted was out of the question, but that if he had any business with Mr. Grice he might, for the reasons I had given, mention it to me. He hesitated, and smiled, and said he was much obliged to me; and then, making as if he was going to step in, added that I should probably be able to appreciate the friendly nature of the business on which he came, when he informed me that he was confidentially employed by Mr. Arthur Carr.

"I felt the name go to my heart like a knife—then my indignation got the better of me. I told him to tell Mr. Carr that the miserable creature whom his villany had destroyed, had fled from her home, had died away from her home, and was buried away from her home; and, with that, I shut the door in his face. My agitation, and a terror I could not account for, so overpowered me that I was obliged to lean against the wall of the passage, and was unable for some minutes to stir a step towards going up stairs. As soon as I got better, and began to think about what had taken place, a doubt came across me as to whether I might not have acted wrong. I remembered that Joshua's lawyers in London had made it a great point that this Mr. Carr should be traced; and though, since then, our situation had been altered by my niece's death, still I felt uneasy—I could hardly tell why—at what I had done. It was as if I had taken some responsibility on myself which ought not to have been mine. I ran back to the door and opened it, and looked up and down the street. It was too late: the strange man was out of sight, and I never set eyes on him again.

"This was in March, the month in which the advertisement appeared. I am particular in repeating the date, because it marks the time of the last information I have to give in connection with the disgraceful circumstances which I here relate. Of the child mentioned in the advertisement, I never heard from that time to this. I do not even know when it was born. I only

know that its guilty mother left her home in December of 1827. Whether it lived, or whether it died, I never wished to discover. I have kept myself retired since the days of my humiliation, hiding my sorrow in my own heart, and neither asking questions nor answering them."

At this place Mat once more suspended perusal of the letter. He had now read on for a long time with unflagging attention, and with the same stern sadness always in his face, except when the name of Arthur Carr occurred in the narrative. Almost on every occasion, when the finger by which he guided himself along the close lines of the letter, came to those words, it trembled a little, and the dangerous look grew brighter in his eyes. It was in them now, as he dropped the letter on his knee, and, turning round, took from the wall behind him, against which it leaned, a leather bag. He opened it, took out a feather fan and an Indian tobacco-pouch of scarlet cloth; and then began to search in the bottom of the bag, from which, at length, he drew forth a letter. It was torn in several places, the ink of the writing was faded, and the paper was disfigured by stains of grease, tobacco, and dirt. The direction was in such a condition that the word "Brazils," at the end, was alone legible. Inside it was not in a much better state. The date at the top, however, still remained easy to distinguish: it was "December 26th, 1827."

Mat looked first at this and then at the paragraph he had been reading in Joanna Grice's narrative. After that, he began to count on his fingers, clumsily—beginning with the year 1828 as Number One, and ending with the current year, 1851, as Number Twenty-three. "Twenty-three," he repeated to himself, "I shall remember that."

He looked down a little vacantly at the old torn letter again. Some of the lines, here and there, had escaped stains and dirt sufficiently to be still legible; and over these his eyes now wandered. The first words that caught his attention ran:—"I am now, therefore, in this bitter affliction, more than ever desirous that all past differences should be forgotten, and"—here the beginning of another line was hidden by a stain, beyond which, on the cleaner part of the letter, the writing proceeded:—"In this spirit, then, I counsel you, if you can get continued employment abroad, to accept it, instead of coming back"—(a rent in the paper made the next words too fragmentary to be easily

legible). * * * "any good news be sure of hearing from me again. In the mean time, I say it once more, keep away. Your presence could do no good; and it is better for you, at your age, to be spared the sight of such sorrow as that we are suffering." (After this, dirt, and the fading of the ink, made several sentences near the end of the page almost totally illegible—the last three or four lines at the bottom of the letter alone remaining clear enough to be read.) * * * "the poor, lost, unhappy creature! But I shall find her, I know I shall find her; and then let Joanna say or do what she may, I will forgive my Mary, for I know she will deserve pardon. As for him, I feel confident that he may be traced yet; and that I can shame him into making the atonement of marrying her. If he should refuse, then the black-hearted villian shall—"

At this point Mat abruptly stopped reading, and, hastily folding up the letter, put it back in the bag again, along with the feather fan and Indian pouch. "I can't go on with that part of the story now, but the time may come—" He pursued the thought which thus expressed itself in him no further, but sat for a few minutes, with his head on his hand and his eyebrows contracted by an angry frown, staring sullenly at the flame of the candle. Joanna Grice's letter remained to be finished. He looked back to the paragraph that he had last read.

"As for the child mentioned in the advertisement"—those were the words to which he was now referring. "The child?"—There was no mention of its sex. "I should like to know if it was a boy or a girl," thought Mat.

Though he was now close to the end of the letter, he roused himself with difficulty to attend to the last few sentences which remained to be read. They began thus:—

"Before I say anything in conclusion, of the sale of our business, of my brother's death, and of the life which I have been leading since, I wish to refer, once for all, to the few things my niece left behind her, when she abandoned her home. Circumstances may, one day, render this necessary. Everything belonging to her is preserved in one of her boxes (now in my possession), as she left it. When the letters signed 'A. C.' were discovered, I threw them into the box. They will all be found, more or less, to prove the justice of those first suspicions of mine, which my late brother unhappily disregarded. In reference to money or valuables, my niece took all her savings with

her. I knew in what box she kept them, and I saw that box open and empty on her table, when I discovered that she was gone. As for the only three articles of jewellery that she had, her brooch I myself saw her give to Ellen Gough—her earrings she always wore—and I can only presume (never having found it anywhere) that she took with her her Hair Bracelet."

"There it is again!" cried Mat, dropping the letter in astonishment, the instant those two words, "Hair Bracelet," caught his eye.

He had hardly uttered the exclamation before he heard the door of the house flung open, then shut with a bang. Zack had just let himself in.

"I'm glad he's come," muttered Mat, snatching up the letter from the floor, and crumpling it into his pocket. "There's a thing or two I want to find out, before I go further—and Zack's the lad to help me."

CHAPTER IX.

MORE DISCOVERIES.

When Zack saw his friend, with legs crossed and hands in pockets, sitting gravely in the usual corner, on the floor, between a brandy-bottle on one side, and a guttering candle on the other, he roared with laughter, and stamped about in his usual boisterous way, till the flimsy little house seemed trembling to its very foundations. Mat bore all the jesting that followed about the futility of drowning his passion for Madonna in the brandy-bottle, with unruffled and exemplary patience. The self-control which he exhibited did not pass without reward. Zack got tired of making jokes which were received with inattention; and, passing at once from the fanciful to the practical, astonished his fellow-lodger, by suddenly communicating a very unexpected piece of news.

"By-the-bye, Mat," he said, "we must sweep the place up, and look respectable, before to-morrow night. My friend Blyth is coming to spend a quiet evening with us. I stayed behind till the visitors had gone, on purpose to ask him."

"Do you mean he's coming to smoke a pipe along with us two?" asked Mat amazedly.

"He's coming here, certainly; but as for grog and pipes, he never touches either. He's the best fellow in the world; but

I'm ashamed to say he's spoony enough to like lemonade and tea. Smoking would make him sick ; and, as for grog, I don't believe a drop ever passes his lips from one year's end to another. A weak head—a wretchedly weak head for drinking," concluded Zack, tapping his forehead with an air of Bacchanalian superiority.

Mat seemed to have fallen into one of his thoughtful fits again. He made no answer, but holding the brandy-bottle standing by his side, up before the candle, looked in to see how much liquor was left.

"Don't bother your head about the brandy: you needn't get any more for Blyth," continued Zack, noticing his friend's action. "I say, do you know that the best thing you ever did in your life was saving Valentine's picture in that way? You have won his heart by it. He was suspicious of my making friends with you before, but now he doesn't seem to think there's a word in the English language good enough for you. He said he should be only too glad to thank you again, when I asked him to come and judge of what you were really like in your lodging. Tell him some of those stories of yours. I've been terrifying him already with one or two of them. Oh Lord! how hospitably we'll treat him—won't we? You shall make his hair stand on end, Mat; and I'll drown him in tea."

"What does he do with them picters of his?" asked Mat. "Sell 'em?"

"Of course!" answered the other; "and gets enormous sums for them." Whenever Zack found an opportunity of magnifying a friend's importance, he always rose grandly superior to mere matter-of-fact restraints, and seized the golden moment without hesitation.

"Get lots of money, does he?" proceeded Mat. "And keeps on hoarding it up, I daresay, like the rest of you?"

"He hoard money!" retorted Zack. "I don't believe he ever hoarded sixpence since he was a baby. If Mrs. Blyth didn't look after him, I don't suppose there would be five pounds in the house from one year's end to another."

There was a moment's silence. (It wasn't because he had money in it, then, thought Mat, that he shut down the lid of that big chest of his so sharp. I wonder whether—)

"He's the most generous fellow in the world," continued Zack, lighting a cigar; "and the best pay: ask his tradespeople."

This remark suspended the conjecture-forming in Mat's mind. He gave up pursuing it, and went on with his questions to Zack. Some part of the additional information that he desired to obtain from young Thorpe, he had got already. He knew now, that when Mr. Blyth shut down the bureau so sharply on Mr. Gimble's approaching, it was not because there was money in it.

"Is he going to bring anybody else with him?" asked Mat.

"Anybody else? Who should he bring? Why, you don't expect him to bring Madonna into our den to preside over grog and pipes—do you?"

"How old is the young woman?" inquired Mat, contemplatively snuffing the candle with his fingers.

"Still harping on my daughter!" shouted Zack, with a burst of laughter. "She's older than she looks. You wouldn't guess her at more than eighteen. But the fact is she's actually twenty-three; steady there! you'll be through the window if you don't sit quieter in your corner."

Twenty-three—The very number he had stopped at when he reckoned the difference on his fingers between 1828 and 1851.

"I suppose the next thing you will say, is that she's too old," Zack went on; "or, perhaps, you may prefer another question or, two first. I'll tell you what, old Rough and Tough, the inquisitive part of your character is beginning to be ——"

"Bother this talking!" interrupted Mat, jumping up, and taking a pack of cards from the chimney-piece. "I ask no questions, and want no answers. Let's have a turn-to at Beggar-my-Neighbour. Sixpence a time. Come on!"

They sat down at one to their cards, playing uninterruptedly for an hour or more. Zack won; and—additionally enlivened by the inspiring influences of grog—rose to a higher and higher pitch of exhilaration with every additional sixpence which his good luck extracted from his adversary's pocket. His gaiety seemed at last to communicate itself even to the imperturbable Mat, who in an interval of shuffling the cards, was heard to deliver himself of one of those gruff chuckles, the nearest approach he was capable of making towards a civilised laugh.

He was so seldom in the habit of exhibiting symptoms of hilarity, that Zack, dealing for the new game, stopped in astonishment, and inquired with curiosity, what it was his friend was "grunting about." At first Mat declined to say; then, on being

pressed, admitted that his mind was running on the "old woman" Zack had spoken of, as having "fallen foul of him in Mr. Blyth's house, because he wanted to give the young woman a present," which circumstance, Mat added, "so tickled his fancy that he would have paid a crown out of his pocket to have seen and heard the squabble."

Zack, whose fancy was now in the condition to be "tickled" by anything that "tickled" his friend, seized the humorous side of the topic, and began describing Mrs. Peckover's peculiarities in a strain of ridiculous exaggeration. Mat listened with such admiring attention, and seemed so amused by everything he said, that, in the excitement of success, he ran into the next room, snatched the two pillows off the bed, fastened one in front and the other behind him, tied the patchwork counterpane over all for a petticoat, and waddled back into his friend's presence, in the character of fat Mrs. Peckover, as she appeared on the evening when she stopped him mysteriously in the passage of Mr. Blyth's house.

Zack was a good mimic; and hit off the peculiarities of Mrs. Peckover's voice, manner, and gait to the life—Mat chuckling all the while, rolling his head from side to side, and striking his fist applaudingly on the table. Encouraged by the effect his performances produced, Zack went through the scene with Mrs. Peckover, from beginning to end; following that excellent woman through the various mazes of "rhodomontade" in which she then bewildered herself, and imitating her terror when he threatened to run upstairs and ask Mr. Blyth if Madonna really had a hair bracelet, with such humour, as made Mat declare that what he had just beheld for nothing would cure him of ever paying money again to see play-acting as long as he lived.

By the time young Thorpe had reached the climax of his improvised entertainment, he had so exhausted himself that he was glad to throw aside the pillows and counterpane, and ready to spend the rest of the evening quietly over the newspaper. His friend did not interrupt him by a word, except at the moment when he sat down; and then Mat said, carelessly enough, that he thought he should detect the original Mrs. Peckover directly by Zack's imitation, if ever he met her. To which young Thorpe replied that he was not likely to do anything of the sort; because Mrs. Peckover lived at Rubbleford, where her husband had some situation, and she herself kept a little dairy and muffin shop.

"She don't come to town above once a-year," concluded Zack, as he lit a cigar; "and then the old beauty stops in-doors all the time!"

In time Zack—on whom literature of any kind always acted as a narcotic—grew drowsy over his newspaper, let his grog get cold, dropped his cigar out of his mouth, and fell asleep in his chair. When he woke, shivering, his watch had stopped, the candle was burning down in the socket, the fire was out, and his fellow-lodger was not to be seen. Young Thorpe knew his friend's strange fancy for "going out over night (as Mat phrased it) to catch the morning the first thing in the fields," too well to be astonished at finding himself alone. He moved away sleepily to bed, yawning out these words:—"I shall see the old boy back again as usual to-morrow morning as soon as I wake."

When the morning came this anticipation proved fallacious. The first objects that greeted Zack's eyes when he awoke about eleven were an arm and a letter, introduced cautiously through his partially opened bedroom door. Though by no means contemptible in regard to muscular development, this was not the herculean arm of Mat. It was only the arm of the servant of all work, who held the barbarian lodger in such awe that she had never been known to venture into the forbidden region of his apartments since he had inhabited them. Zack jumped out of bed and took the letter. It proved to be from Valentine, and summoned him immediately to the painter's house to see Mrs. Thorpe, who earnestly desired to speak with him. His colour changed as he read the lines Mr. Blyth had written, and thought of the prospect of meeting his mother face to face for the first time since he had left his home. He hurried on his clothes, and went out directly—now walking at the top of his speed, now running, in anxiety not to appear dilatory in paying obedience to the summons.

On arriving he was shown into one of the parlours on the ground floor, and there sat Mrs. Thorpe. The meeting between mother and son was characteristic on both sides. Without giving Valentine time to get from his chair to the door—without waiting an instant to ascertain what sentiments towards him were expressed in Mrs. Thorpe's face—without paying the smallest attention to the damage he did to her cap and bonnet—Zack saluted his mother with the old shower of kisses and the old boisterously affectionate hug of his nursery and schoolboy days.

And she, poor woman, feebly faltered over her first words of reproof—then lost her voice altogether, pressed into his hand a little paper packet of miney that she had brought, and wept on his breast without speaking another word. Thus it had been with them long ago, when she was yet young and he but a boy—even as it was now in the latter and sadder time!

Mrs. Thorpe was long in regaining the self-possession she had lost on seeing her son for the first time since his flight from home. Zack expressed contrition over and over again, and many times reiterated his promise to follow the plan Mr. Blyth had proposed to him before his mother became calm enough to speak without bursting into tears. When she recovered herself sufficiently to be able to address him with composure, she did not speak, as he had expected, of his past delinquencies or future prospects, but of the lodging he then inhabited, and of the stranger he had suffered to become his friend. Although Mat's rescue of "Columbus" had warmly predisposed Valentine in his favour, the painter was too conscientious to soften facts on that account, when he told Zack's mother where her son was now living, and what sort of companion he had chosen. Mrs. Thorpe was timid, and distrustful as timid people are; and she now intreated him with nervous eagerness to begin his promised reform by leaving Kirk Street, and at once dropping his intimacy with the vagabond stranger who lived there.

Zack defended his friend to his mother, as he had already defended him to Valentine—but without shaking her opinion, until he bethought himself of promising that in this matter, as in all others, he would be finally guided by Mr. Blyth. The assurance so given, accompanied by the announcement that Valentine was about to form his own judgment of Mr. Marksman by visiting the house in Kirk Street that night, seemed to satisfy Mrs. Thorpe. Her last hopes for her son's future, now that she was forced to admit the sad necessity of conniving at his absence from home, rested one and all on Mr. Blyth.

This first difficulty smoothed over, Zack asked with no little anxiety, whether his father's anger showed any symptoms of subsiding. The question was unfortunate. Mrs. Thorpe's eyes began to fill with tears again, the moment she heard it. The news she had now to tell her son, in answering his inquiries, was very melancholy and hopeless.

The attack of palpitation in the heart which had seized Mr.

Thorpe on the day of his son's flight had been relieved by the remedies employed; but it had been followed by terrible depression, under which the patient seemed to have given way entirely, and for which the doctor was unable to suggest any speedy cure. Few at all times, Mr. Thorpe's words had become fewer than ever. His usual energy appeared to be gone. He still went through the daily business of the religious Societies to which he belonged, in opposition to the doctor's advice; but he performed his duties mechanically, and without apparent interest. He had only referred to his son once in the last two days, and then it was not to talk of reclaim him, not to ask where he had gone, but only to desire that his name might not be mentioned again.

The enumeration of these particulars—interrupted by unavailing lamentations on one side and useless self-reproaches on the other—occupied more time than mother or son imagined. It was not till the clock in Mr. Blyth's hall struck that Mrs. Thorpe discovered how much longer her absence had lasted than she had intended it should. She rose in great trepidation—took a hurried leave of Valentine, who was loitering about his front garden—and departed for home. Zack escorted her to the entrance of the square; and, on taking leave, showed the sincerity of his contrition by offering to return home then and there if she wished it! Mrs. Thorpe's heart yearned to take him at his word, but she remembered the doctor's orders and the critical condition of her husband's health; and forced herself to confess that the time for return had not yet arrived. After this—with mutual promises to communicate again soon—they parted sadly, at the entrance of Baregrove Square: Mrs. Thorpe hurrying nervously to her own door, Zack returning gloomily to Mr. Blyth's.

Meanwhile, how had Mat been occupying himself, since he had left his young friend in the lodging in Kirk Street?

He had really gone out, as Zack had supposed, for one of those long night-walks, which usually took him well into the country before the first grey of daylight had spread over the sky. On ordinary occasions he only indulged in these oddly-timed pedestrian excursions because the restless habits engendered by vagabond life, made him incapable of conforming to civilised hours by spending the earliest part of the morning, like other people, in bed. On this occasion, however, he had gone out with a special purpose; for he had left Kirk Street, not so much

for the sake of taking a walk, as for the sake of thinking at his ease. Mat's brain was never so fertile in expedients as when he was in the open air.

Hardly a word had dropped from Zack which had not either confirmed him in his resolution to possess himself of Valentine's Hair Bracelet, or helped to suggest to him the manner in which his determination might be carried out. The first necessity was to devise means of secretly opening the painter's bureau; the second, to hit on some safe method—should no chance opportunity occur—of approaching it unobserved. Mat had remarked that Mr. Blyth wore the key of the bureau attached to his watch chain; and Mat had just heard from young Thorpe that Mr. Blyth was about to pay them a visit in Kirk Street. On the evening of that visit, therefore, the first of the two objects—the discovery of a means of secretly opening the bureau—might, in some way, be attained. How?

This was the problem which Mat set off to solve, in the silence and loneliness of a long night's walk.

Not a whispered word of the plan he had hit on dropped from Mat's lips, as, turning it this way and that in his thoughts, he walked briskly back to town in the fresh tranquillity of the winter morning. Discreet as he was, however, either some slight practical hints of his present project must have oozed out through his actions when he got back to London; or his notion of the hospitable preparation to be made for the reception of Mr. Blyth, was more eccentric than all the rest of his notions put together.

Instead of going home at once, when he arrived at Kirk Street, he stopped to make some purchases which evidently had reference to the guest of the evening; for the first things he bought were two or three lemons and a pound of loaf sugar. So far his proceedings were intelligible enough; but they became incomprehensible when he began to walk up and down looking about him attentively, stopping at every locksmith's and ironmonger's shop that he passed, waiting to observe the people who might happen to be inside, and then walking on again. In this way he approached in time a filthy row of houses, with ill-looking inhabitants visible in detached positions, staring out of windows or lingering about public-house doors.

Occupying the lower storey of one house was a grimy shop, which, judging by the visible stock-in-trade, dealt on a much

larger scale in iron and steel ware that was old and rusty, than in iron and steel ware that was new and bright. Before the counter no customer appeared; behind it stood a squalid, bushy browed, hump-backed man, as dirty as the dirtiest bit of iron about him, sorting old nails. Mat, who had passed the doors of respectable ironmongers, now entered this dirty shop, and addressed himself to the unattractive stranger behind the counter. The conference in which the two engaged was conducted in low tones, and evidently ended to the satisfaction of both; for the squalid shopman began to whistle as he resumed his sorting of the nails, and Mat muttered, "That's all right," as he came out again.

His next proceeding—always supposing that it had reference to the reception of Mr. Blyth—was still more mysterious. He went into one of those shops dignified by the title of "Italian Warehouses," and bought a lump of the best refined wax! After making this purchase, which he put into the pocket of his trousers, he entered the public-house opposite his lodgings; and, in defiance of what Zack had told him about Valentine's temperate habits, bought, not only a bottle of brandy, but a bottle of rum.

Young Thorpe had not returned from Mr. Blyth's when Mat entered with these purchases. He put the bottles, the sugar, and the lemons in the cupboard—cast a satisfied look at the three clean tumblers and spoons standing on the shelf—relaxed so far from his usual composure of aspect as to smile—lit the fire, and heaped plenty of coal on—then sat down on his bearskins—wriggled himself into the corner, and threw his handkerchief over his face, chuckling gruffly for the first time since the past night, as he put his hand in his pockets, and touched the lump of wax in one of them.

"Now I'm ready for the Painter-Man," growled Mat behind the handkerchief, as he settled himself to go to sleep.

CHAPTER X.

THE SQUAW'S MIXTURE.

Like the majority of those favoured by Nature with, what is termed, "a high flow of animal spirits," Zack was liable to fall from the heights of exhilaration to the depths of despair, without stopping, by the way, at any intermediate stages of moderate

cheerfulness, pensive depression, or tearful gloom. After he had parted from his mother, he presented himself again at Mr. Blyth's, in such a prostrate condition of mind, and talked of his delinquencies and their effect on his father, with such bitterness of self-reproach, as amazed Valentine, and even alarmed him. The painter was no friend to contrite desperation of any kind, and no believer in repentance, which could not look hopefully forward to the future, as well as sorrowfully back at the past. So he laid down his brush, as he was about to begin varnishing the "Golden Age;" and set himself to console Zack, by reminding him of the credit and honour he might yet win, if he was regular in attending to his new studies—if he never flinched from work at the British Museum, and the private Drawing School to which he was to be introduced—and if he ended as he well might, in excusing to his father his determination to be an artist, by showing Mr. Thorpe a prize medal, won by the industry of his hand.

A characteristic of people whose spirits are always running into extremes, is that they generally pass from one mood to another with facility. By the time Zack had exhausted Mr. Blyth's stores of consolation, had partaken of an excellent hot lunch, and had passed an hour up stairs with the ladies, he predicted his own reformation as confidently as he had predicted his own ruin two hours before, and went away to Kirk Street to see that Mat was at home to receive Valentine that evening, stepping along as cheerfully as if he had already vindicated himself to his father by winning every prize medal that the Royal Academy could bestow.

Seven had been fixed as the hour at which Mr. Blyth was to present himself at Kirk Street. He arrived punctual to the appointed time, dressed for the occasion in a frock coat, famous among his acquaintances for its smartness of cut and its fabulous age. From what Zack had told him of Mat, he anticipated a somewhat uncivilised reception from the elder of his hosts; and when he got to Kirk Street he found that his expectations were handsomely realised.

On mounting the dark and narrow staircase, his nose was greeted by a composite smell of fried liver and bacon, brandy and water, and cigar smoke, pouring down to meet him through the crevices of the drawing-room door. When he got into the room the first object that struck his eyes was Zack, with his hat on, vigorously engaged in freshening up the dusty carpet with a

damp mop ; and Mat presiding over the frying-pan, his coat off, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, a glass of steaming hot grog on the chimney-piece above him, and a toasting-fork in his hand.

"Here's the honoured guest arrived before I've swabbed down the decks," cried Zack, jogging his friend in the ribs with the handle of the mop.

"How are you, to-night?" said Mat, not moving from the frying-pan, but getting his right hand free to offer to Mr. Blyth by taking the toasting-fork between his teeth. "Sit anywhere you like ; and holler through the crack in the floor, under the bearskins, if you want anything out of the Bocker-shop." "He means Tobacco when he says Bocker," interposed Zack, parenthetically. "Can you set your teeth in a baked tater?" continued Mat, tapping a small Dutch oven with his toasting-fork. "We've got a lot of fizzin' hot liver and bacon to ease down the taters with what you call a relish. Nice and streaky, ain't it?" Here the host stuck his fork into a slice of bacon, and politely passed it over his shoulder for Mr. Blyth to inspect, as he stood bewildered.

"Oh, delicious!" cried Valentine, smelling as daintily at the bacon as if it had been a nosegay. "Really, my dear sir——." He said no more ; for at that moment he tripped upon one of some ten or dozen bottle-corks which lay on the carpet where he was standing. There is little doubt if Zack had not been by to catch him, that Mr. Blyth would have concluded his polite remarks on the bacon by measuring his length on the floor.

"Why don't you put him into a chair?" growled Mat, reproachfully from the frying-pan, as Valentine recovered his erect position with young Thorpe's assistance.

"I was just going to swab up that part of the carpet when you came in," said Zack, apologetically, as he led Mr. Blyth to a chair.

"Oh don't mention it," answered Valentine, laughing. "It was my awkwardness."

He stopped abruptly again. Zack had placed him with his back to the fire, against a table covered with a dirty cloth which flowed to the floor, and under which, while he was speaking, he had been endeavouring to insinuate his legs. Amazement bereft him of speech when, on succeeding in this effort, he found that his feet came in contact with a hillock of empty bottles, oyster-

shells, and broken crockery, heaped under the table. "Good gracious! I hope I'm doing no mischief!" exclaimed Valentine, as a miniature avalanche of oyster-shells clattered down on his foot, and a plump bottle with a broken neck rolled lazily out from under the table-cloth, and courted observation on the floor.

"Kick about, old fellow, kick about about as much as you please," cried Zack, seating himself opposite Mr. Blyth, and bringing down a second avalanche of oyster-shells. "We are rather put to it for space here, so we keep the cloth always laid for dinner, and make a temporary lumber-room of the place under the table. Rather a new idea, I think—not tidy perhaps, but ingenious, which is better."

"Amazingly ingenious!" said Valentine, now beginning to be amused as well as surprised. "Rather untidy, perhaps, as you say, Zack; but new, and not disagreeable I suppose when you're used to it. What I like about this," continued Mr. Blyth, rubbing his hands cheerfully, and kicking into view another empty bottle, as he settled himself in his chair—"What I like about this is, that it's without ceremony. Do you know I feel at home already, though I never was here before in my life?—Curious, isn't it?"

"Look out for the taters!" roared Mat suddenly from the fire-place. Valentine started, first at the unexpected shout, next at the sight of a big truculently-knobbed potato which came flying over his head, and was dexterously caught and deposited on the dirty table-cloth by Zack. "Two, three, four, five, six," continued Mat, keeping the frying-pan going with one hand, and tossing the baked potatoes with the other over Mr. Blyth's head, in quick succession for young Thorpe to catch. "What do you think of our way of dishing up potatoes?" asked Zack in triumph. "It's a little sudden when you're not used to it," stammered Valentine, ducking his head as each edible missile flew over him—"but it's free and asy—delightfully free and easy." "Ready there with your plates. The liver's a coming," cried Mat in a voice of martial command, suddenly showing his red-hot perspiring face at the table, as he wheeled round from the fire, with the hissing frying-pan in one hand, and the toasting-fork in the other. "My dear sir, I'm shocked to see you taking all this trouble," exclaimed Mr. Blyth; "pray let me help you!" "No, I'm damned if I do," returned Mat, with most polite suavity and perfect good humour. "Let him have all the trouble, Blyth,"

said Zack; "let him help you, and don't pity him. He'll make up for his work, when he sets in seriously to his liver and bacon. Watch him when he begins—he bolts his dinner like the lion in the Zoo."

Mat appeared to receive this speech as a compliment, for he chuckled at young Thorpe and winked grimly at Valentine, as he sat down bare-armed to his liver and bacon. It was certainly a sight to see this singular man eat. Lump by lump, without one intervening morsel of bread, he tossed the meat into his mouth rather than put it there—turned it apparently once round between his teeth—and then swallowed it whole. By the time a quarter of Mr. Blyth's plateful, and half of Zack's had disappeared, Mat had finished his meal; had wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and the back of his hand on the leg of his trousers; had mixed two glasses of hot rum-and-water for himself and Zack; and had set to work on the composition of a third tumbler, into which sugar, brandy, lemon-juice, rum, and hot water all seemed to drop in such incessant and confusing dribblets, that it was impossible to tell which ingredient was uppermost in the mixture. When the tumbler was full, he set it on the table, with a bang, close to Valentine's plate.

"Just try a toothful of that," said Mat. "If you like it, say Yes; if you don't, say No; and I'll make it better next time."

"You are kind, very kind indeed," answered Mr. Blyth, eyeing the tumbler with confusion and hesitation; "but really, though I should be shocked to appear ungrateful, I'm afraid I must—Zack, you ought to have told your friend——"

"So I did," said Zack, sipping his rum-and-water.

"The fact is, my dear sir," continued Valentine, "I have the most wretched head for strong liquor of any kind——"

"Don't call it strong liquor," interposed Mat, tapping the rim of his guest's tumbler with his fore-finger.

"Perhaps," pursued Mr. Blyth, "I ought to have said grog."

"Don't call it grog," retorted Mat, with two dispassionate taps on the rim of the glass.

"Dear me!" asked Valentine, amazedly, "what is it then?"

"It's Squaw's Mixture," answered Mat, with three distinct taps of asseveration.

Mr. Blyth and Zack laughed, under the impression that their companion was joking. Mat looked steadily from one to the other, then repeated with gruff gravity—"It's Squaw's Mixture."

"What a curious name! How is it made?" asked Valentine.

"Enough Brandy to spile the Water. Enough Rum to spile the Brandy and Water. Enough Lemon to spile the Rum and Brandy and Water. Enough Sugar to spile everything. That's 'Squaw's Mixture,'" replied Mat.

Zack began to laugh. Mat became more grave than ever. Mr. Blyth felt interested on the subject of Squaw's Mixture. He stirred it diffidently with his spoon, and asked how his host first learnt to make it.

"When I was out there, in the Nor'-West," began Mat, nodding towards the point of the compass that he mentioned.

"When he says Nor'-West, and wags his addled old head at the chimney-pots, he means North America," Zack explained.

"When I was out Nor'-West," repeated Mat, heedless of interruption, "with the exploring gang, our liquor fell short, and we had to make the best of it in the cold with a spirt of spirits and a pinch of sugar, drowned in more hot water than had ever got down the throat of e'er a man of us before. We christened the brew 'Squaw's Mixture,' because it was such stuff that even a woman couldn't have got drunk on it. Squaw means woman, you know; and Mixture means—what you've got now. I knowed you couldn't stand regular grog, and that's why I cooked it up for you. Don't keep on stirring of it like that, or you'll stir it away altogether. Try it."

"Let me tryit," cried Zach, reaching over to Valentine.

"Don't you go a-shoving of your oar into another man's rollocks," said Mat, knocking Zack's spoon out of his hand just as it touched Mr. Blyth's tumbler. "You stick to your grog; I'll stick to my grog; and he'll stick to Squaw's Mixture." With those words Mat leant his elbows on the table, and watched Valentine's first sip with curiosity.

The result was not successful. When Mr. Blyth put down the tumbler the watery part of the Squaw's Mixture seemed to have got into his eyes, and the spirituous part to have stopped short at his lungs. He shook his head, coughed, and faintly exclaimed—"Too strong."

"Too hot you mean?" said Mat.

"No," pleaded Mr. Blyth, "I really meant too strong."

"Try again," suggested Zack. "Try again. Your liquor all went the wrong way."

"More sugar," said Mat, tossing two lumps into the glass from

where he sat. "More lemon (squeezing one or two drops, and three or four pips, into the mixture). More water (pouring in a tea-spoonful, with a flourish of the kettle). Try again."

"Thank you, thank you. It tastes much nicer now," said Mr. Blyth, beginning cautiously with a spoonful at a time.

Mat's spirits seemed to rise at this announcement. He lit his pipe, and took up his grog; nodded to Valentine and young Thorpe, just as he had nodded to the north-west point of the compass a minute before; muttered gruffly, "Here's all our good healths;" and finished half his liquor at a draught.

"All our good healths!" repeated Mr. Blyth, attacking the squaw's mixture this time without assistance from the spoon.

"All our good healths!" chimed in Zack, draining his glass. "Really, Mat, it's bewildering to see how your dormant social qualities are waking up, now you're plunged into society. What do you say to giving a ball here? You're just the man to get on with the ladies, if you could only be prevailed on to wear your coat, and give up airing your tawny old arms."

"Don't, my dear sir! I particularly beg you won't," cried Valentine, as Mat, awakened to a sense of propriety by Zack's hint, began to unroll one of his tucked-up sleeves. "Consult your own comfort, and keep your sleeves as they were—pray, do! As an artist, I have been admiring your arms from the professional point of view ever since we sat down. I never remember, in all my experience of the living model, having met with such splendid muscular development as yours."

"Hang it, Blyth!" remonstrated Zack, "don't look at his arms as if they were a couple of bits of prize beef! You may talk about his muscular development as much as you please, but you can't have the smallest notion of what it's really equal to till you try it. I say, old Rough-and-Tough! show him how strong you are. Just lift him on your toe, like you did me. (Here Zack pulled Mat unceremoniously out of his chair.) Come along, Blyth! Get opposite to him—give him hold of your hand—stand on the toe part of his right foot—don't wriggle about—stiffen your hand and arm, and—there!—what do you say to his muscular development now?" concluded Zack, with an air of triumph, as Mat slowly lifted from the ground the foot on which Mr. Blyth was standing, and, steadying himself on his left leg, raised the astonished painter with his right nearly two feet high in the air.

Any spectator observing the performance of this feat, and looking only at Mat, might well have thought it impossible that any human being could present a more comical aspect than he now exhibited, with his black skull-cap on one side, and showing an inch or so of his bald head, with his grimly-grinning face empurpled by violent exertion, and with his thick heavy figure ridiculously perched on one leg. Mr. Blyth, however, was the more laughable of the two, as he soared nervously into the air on Mat's foot, tottering infirmly in the strong grasp that supported him, till he seemed trembling all over, from the tips of his crisp black hair to the flying coat tails of his coat. As for the expression of his round rosy face, with the bright eyes fixed in a startled stare, and the plump cheeks crumpled up by an uneasy smile, it was so absurd, as young Thorpe saw it over his fellow-lodger's skull-cap, that he roared again with laughter. "Oh! look up at him!" cried Zack, falling back in his chair. "Look at his face, for heaven's sake, before you put him down!"

But Mat was not moved by this appeal. All the attention his eyes could spare was devoted, not to Mr. Blyth's face, but to Mr. Blyth's watch-chain. There hung the little key of the bureau, dangling to and fro over his waistcoat-pocket. As the right foot of the Sampson of Kirk Street hoisted him up slowly, the key swung temptingly backwards and forwards between them. "Come take me! come take me!" it seemed to say, as Mat's eyes fixed greedily on it.

"Wonderful! wonderful!" cried Mr. Blyth, excessively relieved when he found himself safely on the floor again.

"That's nothing," said Zack. "Look here! Put yourself stomach downwards on the carpet; and if you think the waist-band of your trousers will stand it, he'll take you up in his teeth."

"Thank you, Zack, I'm satisfied without risking my trousers," rejoined Valentine, returning in a hurry to the table.

"The grog's getting cold," grumbled Mat. "Do you find it slip down easy now?" he continued, handing the squaw's mixture in the friendliest manner to Mr. Blyth.

"Astonishing easy!" answered Valentine, drinking with the boldness of Zack himself. "Now it's cooler, one tastes the sugar. Whenever I've tried to drink regular grog, I have never been able to get it sweet enough. The delicious part of this is there's plenty of sugar in it. And, besides, it has the merit of

being harmless. It tastes strong to me, to be sure; but I'm not used to spirits. After what you say, however, of course, it must be harmless—perfectly harmless." Here he sipped again, freely this time, by way of convincing himself of the innocent weakness of the squaw's mixture.

While Mr. Blyth had been speaking, Mat's hands had been stealing deeper and deeper into the pockets of his trousers, until his finger and thumb, and a certain plastic substance hidden in the left-hand pocket came into contact, just as Valentine left off speaking. "Let's have another toast," cried Mat, briskly, the instant the last word was out of his guest's mouth. "Come on, one of you, and give us another toast," he reiterated, with a roar of barbarous joviality, taking up his glass in his right hand, and keeping his left still in his pocket.

"Give you another toast!" repeated Zack, "I'll give you five, all at once! Mr. Blyth, Mrs. Blyth, Madonna, Columbus, and The Golden Age—three excellent people and two glorious pictures; let's lump them together in a friendly way, and drink long life and success to them!" shouted the young gentleman, making rapid progress through his second glass.

"I'm afraid I must change to some other place, if you have no objection," said Mr. Blyth, after he had duly honoured the toast proposed. "The fire is getting too hot."

"Change along with me," said Mat. "I don't mind heat."

Valentine accepted this offer with gratitude. "By-the-bye, Zack," he said, placing himself in his host's chair, between the table and the wall, "I was going to ask a favour of our friend, when you suggested that wonderful trial of strength. You have been of such inestimable assistance to me already, my dear sir," he continued, turning towards Mat, all his natural cordiality now fully developed, under the influence of the Squaw's Mixture. "You have laid me under such an inexpressible obligation in saving my picture——"

"I wish you could say what you want in plain words," interrupted Mat. "I'm one of your rough-handed, thick-headed sort. I'm not gentleman enough to understand parlarver. It don't do me no good: it worrits me into a perspiration." And Mat, shaking down his shirt-sleeve, drew it across his forehead, as proof of the truth of his last assertion.

"Quite right! quite right!" cried Mr. Blyth, patting him on the shoulder in the most friendly manner. "In plain words,

then, when I mentioned just now how much I admired your arms in an artistic point of view, I was only paving the way for asking you to let me make a drawing of them, in black and white, for a picture that I mean to paint later. My classical figure composition, you know, Zack—you have seen the sketch—Hercules bringing to Eurystheus the Erymanthian boar—a glorious subject; and our friend's arms, and, indeed, his chest, too, if he would kindly consent to sit for it, would make the very studies I want for Hercules."

"What is he driving at?" asked Mat, addressing young Thorpe, after staring at Valentine in speechless amazement.

"He wants to draw your arms, of course, you will be happy to let him; you can't understand now, but you will when you begin to sit—pass the cigars—thank Blyth for meaning to make a Hercules of you," answered Zack, joining his sentences together in his most off-hand manner, all in a breath.

"Where?" asked Mat, in a densely stupefied condition.

"My painting room," replied Valentine. "Where you saw the pictures yesterday.

Mat considered a moment—then brightened up, and began to look intelligent again. "I'll come," he said, "as soon as you like," clapping his fist emphatically on the table, and drinking to Valentine with his heartiest nod.

"That's a good fellow!" cried Mr. Blyth, drinking to Mat in return. "The sooner the better. Come to-morrow evening."

"All right. To-morrow evening," assented Mat. His left hand, as he spoke, began to work stealthily round and round in his pocket, moulding into strange shapes, that plastic substance, hidden there ever since his shopping in the morning.

"I should ask you to come in the day-time," continued Valentine; "but, as you know, Zack, I have the Golden Age to varnish, and one or two things to alter in Columbus; and by the end of the week, I must leave home to do those portraits in the country I told you of, and which are wanted before I thought they would be. You will come with our friend, Zack? As for the Private Drawing Academy——"

"No offence; but I can't stand seeing you stirring up them grounds in your glass," Mat broke in here; taking Mr. Blyth's tumbler as he spoke, throwing the sediment of sugar, the pips, and the little liquor left to cover them, into the grate; and devoting himself to the concoction of a second supply of that innocuous beverage, Squaw's Mixture.

"Half a glass," cried Mr. Blyth. "Weak—remember my wretched head for drinking, and pray make it weak."

As he spoke, the clock struck.

"Only nine," exclaimed Zack, referring ostentatiously to the watch which he had taken out of pawn the day before. "Pa s the rum, Mat, as soon as you've done with it—put the kettle on—we'll soon spend the evening in earnest!"

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If any fourth gentleman had been present "spending the evening," as Zack chose to phrase it, at the soirée in Kirk Street; and if that gentleman had deserted the festive board as the clock struck nine, and had then, as the clock struck ten, returned to the society of his convivial companions, he would have been taken by surprise, on beholding the singular change which the lapse of one hour had been sufficient to produce in Mr. Valentine Blyth.

It might have been that the simple-hearted gentleman had been unduly stimulated by the ~~reek~~ of hot grog, which, in association with tobacco smoke, now filled the room; or it might have been that the second brew of the Squaw's Mixture had exceeded half a glass-ful in quantity, had not been diluted to the requisite weakness, and had consequently got into his head; but, whatever the cause might be, the alteration that had taken place since nine, in his voice, looks, and manners, was remarkable. He now talked incessantly about nothing but the fine arts; he differed with both his companions, and loftily insisted on his superior sagacity, whenever either ventured to speak; he was by turns as noisy as Zack, and as gruff as Mat; his hair was crumpled over his forehead, his eyes were dimmed, his shirt collar was turned rakishly over his cravat; in short, he was not Valentine Blyth at all,—he was only a tipsy counterfeit.

As for young Thorpe, any steadiness of brain he might naturally possess, he had long parted with, for the evening. Mat alone remained unchangel. There he sat, reckless of the blazing fire, still with that hand of his dropping stealthily now and then into his pocket; smoking, drinking, and staring at his companions, as gruffly self-possessed as ever.

"There's ten," muttered Mat, as the clock struck. "I said we should be getting jolly by ten. Se we are."

Zack nodded solemnly, and stared at one of the empty bottles

on the floor, which had rolled from the temporary store-room under the table.

"Hold your tongues!" cried Mr. Blyth. "I insist on clearing up that point whether artists are not as hardy and strong as other men. I'm an artist, and I say they are. I'll agree with you in everything else; for you're the best fellows in the world; but if you say a word against artists, I'm your enemy. You may talk to me about admirals, generals, and prime ministers—I mention the glorious names of Michael Angelo and Raphael; and down goes your argument. When Michael Angelo's nose was broken do you think he minded it? Look in his Life, and see if he did. Ha! Ha! My painting-room is forty feet long (now this is important). While I was painting Columbus and the Golden Age, one was at one end—north: and the other at the other—south. Very good. I walked backwards and forwards between these pictures incessantly, and never sat down all day. This is a fact—and the proof is, that I worked on both at once. A touch on Columbus—a walk into the middle of the room to look at the effect—turn round—walk up to the Golden Age opposite—a touch on the Golden Age—another walk into the middle of the room to look at the effect—another turn round—and back to Columbus. Fifteen miles a-day of in-door exercise, according to calculation of a mathematical friend; and not including the times I had to go up and down my portable wooden steps to get at the top of Columbus. Isn't a man strong who can stand that? Ha! Feel my legs, Zack. Are they hard and muscular, or are they not?"

Here Mr. Blyth, rapping young Thorpe on the head with his spoon, tried to skip out of his chair nimbly, but only succeeded in floundering awkwardly into an upright position, after he had knocked down his plate with the remains of the liver and bacon on it. Zack roused himself from muddled meditation; and, under pretence of obeying his friend, pinched Valentine's leg with such vigour, that the painter screamed. All this time Mat sat serene in his place next to the fire. He kicked Mr. Blyth's broken plate, with the scraps of liver and bacon, and the knife and fork, into the store-room under the table—and then pushed towards him another glass of squaw's mixture, quietly concocted while he had been talking.

The effect on Valentine of this proved singularly soothing. He had been getting more and more disputations for the last ten

minutes; but the moment the steaming glass touched his hand it seemed to change his mood with magical celerity. As he looked at it, and felt the fragrant rum steaming into his nostrils, his face expanded, and while his left hand unsteadily conveyed the tumbler to his lips, his right reached across the table and fraternally extended itself to Mat. "My dear friend," said Mr. Blyth, "how kind you are! How do you make the Squaw's mixture?"

"I say, Mat, tell us something," interposed Zack. "Bowl away with one of your stories, or Blyth will be bragging again about his rickety old legs. Tell us how you lost your scalp."

Mat laid down his pipe, and for a moment looked at Mr. Blyth—then with uncharacteristic docility, began his story, without another word of persuasion. In general, the reverse of tedious when he related experiences of his own, he seemed, on this occasion, perversely bent on letting his narrative ooze out to interminable length. Instead of adhering to the abridged account of his terrible adventure, which he had given Zack when they talked together on Blackfriars Bridge, he now dwelt drowsily on the minutest particulars of the murderous chase that had so nearly cost him his life, enumerating them one after the other in the same heavy, droning voice which never changed its tone in the slightest degree. After ten minutes' endurance of the narrative-infliction which he had himself provoked, young Thorpe was beginning to feel a sensation of oblivion stealing over him, when lusty snoring close at his back startled him into wakefulness. He looked round. There was Mr. Blyth placidly asleep, his mouth wide open and his head resting against the wall.

"Stop!" whispered Mat, as Zack seized a half-squeezed lemon and took aim at Valentine's mouth. "Don't wake him. What do you say to some oysters?"

"Give us a dish," returned young Thorpe. "Sally's in bed by this time—I'll fetch the oysters myself. But, I say, I must have a friendly shot with something at old Blyth's mouth."

"Try him with an oyster, when you come back," said Mat, producing from the cupboard a large pie-dish. "Go on! I'll see you down stairs, and leave the door on the jar, so as you can get in quietly. Steady! and mind the dish when you cross the road." With these words Mat dismissed Zack to the oyster shop; and returned immediately to his guest upstairs.

Valentine was snoring vehemently. Mat's hand descended

again into his pocket, reappearing quickly enough on this occasion with the wax purchased that morning. Steadying his arms on the table, he detached the little chain which held the key from the watchguard to which it was fastened, took on his wax a perfect impression of the whole key from the pipe to the handle, attached it again to the sleeper's watchguard, pared away the rough ends of the wax till it fitted into an old tin tobacco-box which he took from the chimney-piece, pocketed this box, and then resumed his place at the table.

"Now," said Mat, looking at the unconscious Blyth, after he had lit his pipe again; "Now, Painter-Man! wake up as soon as you like."

It was not before Zack returned. A bang of the street-door announced his entry into the passage—a clattering and stumbling marked his progress up stairs—a crash, a heavy thump, and a shout of laughter indicated his arrival on the landing. Mat ran out and found him on the floor, with the pie-dish in halves at the bottom of the stairs, and oyster-shells scattered about in every direction.

"Hurt?" inquired Mat, pulling him up, and dragging him into the room:

"Not a bit," answered Zack. "I've woke Blyth, though, and spoilt our shot with the oyster. How he stares!"

Valentine certainly did stare. He was standing up leaning against the wall, and looking about him in a dazed condition. Either his nap, or the manner in which he had been awakened, had produced a decided change for the worse in him. As he slowly recovered what little sense he had left to make use of, all his cordiality seemed to desert him. He shook his head mournfully; refused to eat or drink anything; declared that his digestion was "a wreck in consequence of keeping drunken society;" and insisted on going home directly, in spite of everything Zack could say. The landlord, who had been brought from his shop below by the noise, and who thought it desirable to take the first opportunity of breaking up the party before more grog was consumed, ran down and called a cab—the result of this manœuvre proving to be what the tobacconist desired. The moment the sound of the wheels was heard Mr. Blyth clamoured for his hat and coat; and, after some demur, was at last helped into the cab in the most attentive manner by Mat.

"See the lights out upstairs, and the young 'un in bed," said

Mat to his landlord, as they stood on the door-step. "I'm going to blow some of the smoke out of me by taking a turn."

He walked away briskly, as he said the words; but when he got to the end of the street, instead of proceeding towards the country, and the cool night-breeze blowing from it, he turned towards the filthiest little lanes and courts in the neighbourhood.

Stepping along at a rapid pace, he directed his course towards that particular row of small and vile houses which he had visited early in the day; and stopped at the second-hand iron shop. It was shut; but a dim light glimmered through the holes in the tops of the shutters; and when Mat knocked with his knuckles it was opened by the hump-backed shopman with whom he had conferred in the morning.

"Got it?" asked the hump-back in a querulous voice, the moment the door was ajar.

"All right," answered Mat in his gruffest tones, handing the man the tobacco-box.

"We said to-morrow evening," continued the squalid shopman.

"Not later than six," added Mat.

"Not later than six," repeated the other, shutting the door as his customer walked away to seek fresh air in earnest.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GARDEN DOOR.

"I'll chance it to-night." Those words were the first that issued from Mat's lips on the morning after Mr. Blyth's visit, as he stood amid the festive relics of the evening in the room at Kirk Street. "To-night," he repeated, as he pulled off his coat and prepared to make his toilette in a pail of cold water, with the assistance of a bar of yellow soap.

Though it was still early, his mind had been employed for hours in considering how the only difficulty which now stood between him and the possession of the Hair Bracelet, might be overcome. Having procured the first requisite for executing his design, how was he to profit by what he had gained? Knowing that the false key would be in his hands that evening, how was he to open Mr. Blyth's bureau without discovery.

He was still engaged over the pail of cold water, when a loud yawn, which died away into a dreary howl, sounded from the

next room, and announced that Zack was awake. In another minute the young gentleman appeared gloomily, in his night gown, at the folding doors by which the rooms communicated. His eyes looked red-rimmed and blinking, his cheeks mottled and sodden, his hair tangled. He had one hand to his forehead, and groaning with the corners of his mouth lamentably drawn down, exhibited a shocking picture of the consequences of excessive conviviality.

"Oh Lord, Mat!" he moaned, "my head's coming in two."

"Souse it in a pail of cold water, and walk off what you can't get rid off, after that, along with me," suggested his friend.

Zack took this advice. As they left Kirk Street for their walk, Mat managed that they should shape their course so as to pass Valentine's house. As he had anticipated, young Thorpe proposed to call in to see how Mr. Blyth was after the festivities, and to ascertain if he still remained in the same mind about drawing Mat's arms that evening.

"You didn't brew the Squaw's Mixture as weak as you told us you did," said Zack silyly, when they rang at the bell. "It wasn't a bad joke for once. But Blyth is such a good fellow, it seems too bad—in short, don't let's do it next time!"

Mat gruffly repudiated the intention of deceiving their guest as to the strength of the liquor he had drunk. They went into the Painting Room, and found Mr. Blyth pale and penitent, but manfully preparing to varnish *The Golden Age*, with a trembling hand and a very headachy contraction of the eyebrows.

"Ah, Zack, Zack! I ought to lecture you," said Valentine; "but I have no right to say a word, for I was the worst. I'm wretchedly ill, which is what I deserve; and ashamed of myself, which is only what I ought to be. Look at my hand! It's all in a tremble. Not a thimbleful of spirits shall ever pass my lips again; I'll stick to lemonade and tea for the rest of my life. No more Squaw's Mixture for me! Not, my dear sir," continued Valentine, addressing Mat, who had been stealing a glance at the bureau, while the painter was speaking. "Not, my dear sir, that I think of blaming you, or doubt for a moment that the drink you kindly mixed for me would have been considered weak and harmless by people with stronger heads than mine. It was my own fault, my own want of proper caution. If I misconducted myself last night, pray make allowances——"

"Nonsense!" cried Zack, seeing Mat begining to fidget away

from Valentine, instead of returning an answer. "Nonsense! you were glorious company. We were three choice spirits, and you were number One of the social Trio. Away with Melancholy! Do you still keep in the same mind about drawing Mat's arms? He will be delighted to come, and so shall I; and we'll all get virtuously uproarious on toast-and-water and tea."

"Of course I keep in the same mind," returned Mr. Blyth. "I had my senses about me when I invited you and your friend here to-night. Not that I shall be able to do much in the way of drawing—for a letter has come this morning to hurry me into the country, and I shall have to start to-morrow. However, I can get in the outline of your friend's arms to-night, and leave the rest to be done when I come back. Shall I take that sketch down for you to look at close?" continued Valentine, suddenly raising his voice and addressing Mat. "I think it one of my most conscientious studies."

While Mr. Blyth and Zack had been whispering, Mat had walked quietly towards one end of the room, and was standing close to a door, lined with sheet iron, having bolts at top and bottom, and leading down a flight of steps from the studio into the back garden. Above this door hung a chalk sketch of an old five-barred gate, being the study from nature which, as Valentine imagined, was at that moment of interest to Mat.

"No, no! don't get the sketch now," said Zack, answering. "We are going to get freshened up by a long walk, and can't stop. Now then, Mat; what are you staring at? The garden door, or the sketch of the five-barred gate?"

"The picter," answered Mat, with unusual irritability.

"It shall be taken down for you to look at to-night," said Mr. Blyth, delighted by the impression which the five-barred gate seemed to have produced.

On leaving Mr. Blyth's, young Thorpe and his companion turned down a lane partially built over, which led past Valentine's back garden wall. This was their nearest way to the high road into the country. Before they had taken six steps Mat, who had been incomprehensibly taciturn inside the house, became as incomprehensibly talkative all on a sudden outside it.

He insisted on mounting some planks lying under Valentine's wall, to be used for the new houses that were being built, and peeping over to see what sort of garden the painter had. Zack summarily pulled him down by the coat-tails, but not before his

eye had travelled over the garden ; had ascended the steps leading from it to the studio ; and had risen above them as high as the handle of the door by which they were approached from the painting-room.

When he had been prevailed on to start fairly for the walk Mat began to ask questions with the same inquisitiveness which he had already displayed on the day of the picture-show. He set out with wanting to know whether there were to be any strange visitors at Mr. Blyth's that evening ; and then, reminded that Valentine had said at parting, "Nobody but ourselves," asked if they were likely to see the painter's wife downstairs. After the inquiry had been answered in the negative, he went on to a third question, and desired to know whether "the young woman" (as he persisted in calling Madonna) might be expected to stay upstairs with Mrs. Blyth, or to show herself in the painting-room. Zack answered this inquiry also in the negative—with a running accompaniment of jokes, as usual. Madonna never came into the studio in the evening, when Mr. Blyth had company there.

Mat now wanted to know at what time Mr. Blyth and his family were accustomed to go to bed ; and explained, when Zack expressed astonishment at the inquiry, that he had only asked in order to find out the hour at which it would be proper to take leave. On hearing this, young Thorpe answered carelessly that the painter's family were early people, who went to bed before eleven ; adding that it was necessary to leave the studio in good time on the occasion referred to, because Valentine would start for the country next day, by one of the morning trains.

Mat's next question was preceded by a silence. Possibly he was thinking in what terms he might best put it. If this were the case, he certainly decided on the briefest possible form of expression, for when he spoke, he asked in so many words, what sort of a woman the painter's wife was.

Zack answered by a torrent of superlative eulogies on Mrs. Blyth ; and passing from the lady to the chamber that she inhabited, wound up with a magnificent description of the splendour of her room.

Mat listened attentively ; then said he supposed Mrs. Blyth must be fond of curiosities, and "knick-knack things from foreign parts." Young Thorpe not only answered in the affirmative, but added, as his own opinion, that he believed these said

curiosities and "knick-knacks" had helped to keep her alive by keeping her amused. From this, he digressed to a long narrative of Mrs. Blyth's first illness; and having exhausted that subject at last, ended by calling on his friend to change the conversation.

But at this point, Mat was perversely determined to let himself lapse into another silent fit. He ceased asking questions; and hardly uttered another word. Zack, after vainly trying to rally him into talking, lit a cigar in despair, and the two walked on together silently—Mat, his hands in his pockets, keeping his eyes bent on the ground, and burying himself, as it were, from the outer world, in the innermost recesses of a brown study.

As they returned and got near Kirk Street, Mat gradually began to talk again, but on indifferent subjects; asking no more questions about Mr. Blyth. They arrived at their lodgings at half-past five o'clock. Zack went into the bed-room to wash his hands. While thus engaged, Mat opened that leather bag of his, and taking out the feather-fan and the Indian tobacco-pouch, wrapped them up separately in paper. Having done this, he called to Zack; and, saying that he was about to step over to the shaving shop to get his face scraped before going to Mr. Blyth's, left the house with his two packages.

"If the worst comes to the worst, I'll chance it to-night with the garden-door," said Mat to himself, as he took the turning that led towards the second-hand iron shop. "This will get rid of the painter-man. And this will send Zack after him," he added, putting first the fan and then the tobacco-pouch into separate pockets. A cunning smile hovered about his lips, as he disposed of his packages in this manner; but it passed away almost immediately, and was succeeded by a curious contraction of the upper part of his face. He began muttering again that name of "Mary," which had been often on his lips lately; and quickened his pace, as was his habit when anything disturbed him.

When he reached the shop, the hunch-back was at the door, with the tobacco-box. On this occasion not a word was exchanged between the two. The squalid shopman, as the customer approached, rattled something inside the box, and handed it to Mat; and Mat put his finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket, nodded, and handed some money to the squalid shopman. The giving and taking completed, these two originals

turned from each other without a word of farewell; the hunchback returning to the counter, and his customer proceeding to the shaving shop.

Mat opened the box for an instant, on his way to the barber's; and, taking out the false key, put it into his waistcoat pocket. He then stopped at an oil-shop, and bought a taper and a box of matches. "The garden door's safest: I'll chance the garden-door," thought Mat, as he sat down in the shaving-shop chair, and ordered the barber to operate on his chin.

Punctually at seven Mr. Blyth's visitors rang his bell.

When they entered the studio, they found Valentine ready for them, with his drawing-board at his side, and his cartoon-sketch for the proposed new picture of Hercules bringing to King Eurystheus the Erymanthian Boar, rolled up at his feet. He said he had got rid of his headache, and felt perfectly well; but Zack observed that he was not in his usual spirits. Mat, on his side, observed nothing but the garden door, towards which he lounged carelessly.

"This way," said Valentine, walking after him. "I have taken down the drawing you were so good as to admire, as I said I would. Here it is on this painting-stand."

Mat, whose first glance at the garden door had assured him that it was bolted for the night, wheeled round, and, to Mr. Blyth's delight, inspected the sketch of the old gate with flattering attention. "Wants doing up, don't it?" said Mat, referring to the picturesquely-ruinous original. "Yes, indeed," answered Valentine, thinking he spoke of the ragged condition of the paper on which the sketch was made; "a morsel of paste and a sheet of fresh paper to stretch it on, would make another thing of it." Mat started. "Paste and paper for a five-barred gate? A nice carpenter you would make!" he felt inclined to say. Zack, however, spoke at that moment: so he wisely held his tongue.

"Now, then, Mat, strip, and put your arms in any position Blyth tells you. Remember, you are going to be drawn as Hercules; and look as if you were bringing the Boar to King Eurystheus, for the rest of the evening," said young Thorpe, warming himself.

While Mat awkwardly, and with many expressions of astonishment at the strange piece of service required by his host, divested himself of his upper garments, Valentine unrolled on

the floor the paper cartoon of his classical composition; and, having refreshed his memory, put his model into the position of Hercules, with a chair to hold instead of an Erymanthian Boar, and Zack to look at as the representative of King Eurystheus. This done, Mr. Blyth wasted some time before he began to work, in looking for his materials. In his search over the littered table, he laid his hand on two envelopes with enclosures, which, after examining the addresses, he gave to young Thorpe.

"Zack," he said, "these belong to you. The large envelope contains your permission to draw at the British Museum. The small one has a letter of introduction inside, presenting you, with my recommendations, to my friend, Mr. Strather, the Curator of an excellent private Drawing Academy. Call to-morrow about eleven. Mr. Strather will go with you to the Museum, and show you how to begin, and introduce you to his drawing academy the same evening. Be steady and careful. Remember all you promised your mother and me; and show us that you are determined to study Art in earnest."

After a little longer delay Valentine at last collected his drawing materials, and fairly began work; Mat displaying admirable steadiness as a model. But, while the work of the studio proceeded with all the smoothness that could be desired, the conversation by no means kept pace with it. In spite of all that young Thorpe could do, the talk grew duller and duller. Valentine was out of spirits, and the Hercules of the evening stolidly abandoned himself to inveterate silence. At length Zack gave up all effort to be sociable, and left the painting-room to go up stairs. Mat looked after him as he quitted the studio, and seemed about to speak—then glancing at the bureau, checked himself, and did not utter a word.

Mr. Blyth's depression of spirits was not entirely attributable to reluctance to leave home, which he had been trying to shake off since morning. He had a secret reason for his uneasiness intimately connected with the model, whose Herculean chest and arms he was now drawing.

The fact was that Mr. Blyth's conscience smote him when he remembered the trust Mrs. Thorpe placed in his supervision over her son, and reflected that he still knew as little of Zack's strange companion, as Zack did. His visit to Kirk Street, undertaken for the purpose of guarding the lad's interests by

definitely ascertaining who Mr. Mathew Marksman was, had ended in—what he was now ashamed to even to call to mind. “Dear me!” thought Mr. Blyth, while he worked away silently, “I ought to find out whether this good natured man is fit to be trusted with Zack; and now the lad is out of the room, I might do it. I will!” And simple-hearted Mr. Blyth actually set himself to ask Mat who he really was!

Mat was candour itself in answering all inquiries that related to his wanderings. He confessed with frankness that he had been sent to sea, as a boy whom it was impossible to keep steady at home; and he readily admitted that he had not introduced himself to Zack under his real name. But at this point communicativeness stopped. He did not quibble, or prevaricate; he bluntly and simply declared that he would tell nothing more than he had told already.

“I said,” concluded Mat, “when we come together, ‘I haven’t heard my own name for twenty year; and I don’t care if I never hear it again.’ That’s what I said to him. That’s what I say to you. I’m a rough ‘un, I know; but I hav’n’t broke out of prison, or cheated the gallows—”

“My dear sir,” interposed Valentine, alarmedly, “pray don’t imagine any such offensive ideas entered my head! I might perhaps have thought that family troubles—”

“That’s it,” Mat broke in. “Family troubles. Drop it there, and you’ll leave it right.”

Before Mr. Blyth could attempt to shift the conversation to some less delicate topic, he was interrupted, to his great relief, by the return of young Thorpe.

Zack announced the approaching arrival of the supper-tray; and warned “Hercules” to cover up his neck and shoulders, unless he wished to frighten the housemaid. At this point Mr. Blyth laid aside his drawing-board, and Mat put on his flannel waistcoat, not listening to one of the fervent expressions of gratitude addressed to him, but in a violent hurry to array himself in his coat again. As soon as he had got it on, he put his hand in one of the pockets, and looked at Valentine. Just then, however, the servant came in with the tray; upon which he turned round impatiently, and walked away once again to the lower end of the room.

When the door had closed on the housemaid, he returned to Mr. Blyth with the feather fan in his hand; and saying, in his

downright way, that he had heard of Mrs. Blyth's invalid condition and of her fondness for curiosities, asked the painter if his wife would like such a fan as that now produced.

"I got this for a woman in the old country, many a year ago," said Mat, pressing the fan roughly into Mr. Blyth's hands. "When I come back, and thought to give it her, she was dead and gone. If you're too proud to let your wife have the thing, throw it in the fire. I hav'n't got nobody to give it to; and I can't, and won't, keep it by me, any longer."

In the utterance of these words there was a rough pathos and bitter reference to past calamity, which touched Valentine. Generous instincts overcame prudent doubts, and moved him, not merely to accept the present, but to predict warmly that Mrs. Blyth would be delighted.

"Zack," he said, in an undertone to young Thorpe, who had been listening to Mat, and observing his production of the fan, in silent surprise. "Zack, I'll run up stairs with the fan to Lavvie, so as not to seem careless about your friend's gift."

Speaking these words, Mr. Blyth bustled out of the room. A minute or two after, Mat put his hand into his pocket once more; mysteriously approached young Thorpe, and opened before him the paper containing the Indian tobacco-pouch, which was of scarlet cloth, and decorated with beads.

"Do you think the young woman would fancy this for a kind of plaything?" he asked.

Zack, with a shout, snatched the pouch out of his hands, and began to rally his friend unmercifully. For the first time, Mat seemed irritated by the merriment of which he was made the object; and cut his tormentor short quite fiercely.

"Don't lose your temper, you amorous old savage!" cried Zack. "I'll take your pouch upstairs to the Beloved Object, and, if Blyth will let her have it, I'll bring her down here to thank you for it!" Saying this, young Thorpe ran laughing out of the room, with the pouch in his hand.

Mat listened intently till the sound of Zack's footsteps died away—then walked quickly and softly down the studio to the garden door—gently unlocked it—gently drew the bolts back—gently opened it, and ascertained that it could also be opened from without, merely by turning the handle—then, quietly closing it again, left it, to all appearances, as fast for the night as

before; provided no one went near enough to observe that it was neither bolted nor locked.

"Now for the big chest!" thought Mat, taking the false key out of his pocket, and hastening back to the bureau. "If Zack or the Painter Man come down before I've time to get at the drawer, I've made sure of the garden door."

He had the key in the lock of the bureau, as this thought passed through his mind. He was just about to turn it, when the sound of footsteps upon the stairs struck on his quick ear.

"Too late!" muttered Mat. "I must chance the garden door."

Putting the key into his pocket, as he said this, he walked back to the fire-place. The moment after Mr. Blyth entered.

"I am shocked that you should have been unceremoniously left," said Valentine, whose courteous manner prompted him to be as scrupulously polite to his rough guest, as if Mat had been a gentleman of the most exalted rank. "I am so sorry you should have been left, through Zack's carelessness," continued Valentine, turning to the table. "Mrs. Blyth, my dear sir (do take a sandwich!), desires me to express her best thanks for your pretty present. She admires the design (sponge-cake? Ah! you don't care about sweets), and thinks the colour of the centre feathers——"

At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Blyth, abruptly closing his lips, looked towards it with blank astonishment; for he beheld Madonna entering in company with Zack.

Valentine had been persuaded to let the deaf and dumb girl accept the pouch by his wife; but neither she nor Zack had said a word about taking Madonna into the studio. When the painter was out of earshot, young Thorpe had confided to Mrs. Blyth the freak in which he wanted to engage; and, signing to Madonna that she was wanted in the studio, to be presented to the "generous man who had given her the pouch," took her out of the room without stopping to hear the remonstrance by which his proposition was met. To confess the truth, Mrs. Blyth—seeing no impropriety in the girl's being introduced to the stranger, while Valentine was present in the room, and having moreover a strong curiosity to hear all she could about Zack's companion—was anxious to ascertain what impressions Madonna would bring away of Mat. And thus Zack, by seizing his opportunity at the right moment, and exerting a little of that assurance

in which he was never deficient, now entered the painting room in mischievous triumph with Madonna on his arm.

Valentine gave him a look as he entered which he found it convenient not to see. The painter felt strongly inclined, at that moment, to send his adopted child upstairs again directly; but he restrained himself out of delicacy towards his guest—for Mat had not only seen Madonna, but had hesitatingly advanced to meet her, the instant she came into the room.

Madonna, perceiving that the stranger showed evident signs, on approaching her, of what appeared like confusion to her apprehension, quietly drew her arm out of Zack's, and, to his astonishment, stepped forward in front of him—looked up into the grim, scarred face of Mat—dropped her usual curtsy—wrote a line hurriedly on her slate—then offered it to him with a smile, to read if he pleased, and to write on in return.

"Who would ever thought it?" cried Zack, giving vent to his amazement; "she has taken to old Rough and Tough, and made him a prime favourite at first sight!"

Valentine, standing near, did not appear to hear. He was watching the scene. Accustomed as he was to the candour with which the girl always showed her approval or dislike of strangers—as also to her apparent perversity in often displaying a liking for the very people whose looks and manners had been previously considered certain to displease her—He was almost as much surprised as Zack, when he witnessed her reception of Mat. It was an infallible sign of Madonna's approval, if she followed up an introduction by handing her slate of her own accord to a stranger. When she was presented to people whom she disliked, she invariably kept it by her side until it was asked for.

Eccentric in everything, Mat, was consistently eccentric in his confusion. Some men who are bashful in a lady's presence show it by blushing—Mat's colour sank instead of rising. Other men, similarly affected, betray their burdensome modesty by fidgiting incessantly. Mat was as still as a statue. His eyes wandered vacantly over the girl, beginning with her soft brown hair, then resting for a moment on her face, then descending to the ribbon on her breast, and to her crisp black silk apron with its smart lace pockets—then dropping at last to her shoes. He only looked up again, when she touched his hand and put her pencil into it. At that he raised his eyes once more, read the

line she had written to thank him for the pouch, and tried to write something in return. But his hand shook, and his thoughts seemed to fail him. He gave her back the slate and pencil looking her full in the eyes as he did so. A curious change came over his face at the same time—a change like that which had altered him so remarkably in the shop at Dibbledean.

“Zack might have made a worse friend than this man,” thought Mr. Blyth, still attentively observing Mat. “Vagabonds don’t behave in the presence of young girls as he is behaving.”

With this idea in his mind, Valentine advanced to help his guest by showing Mat how to communicate with Madonna. The painter was interrupted, however, by young Thorpe, who began to talk nonsense again, at the top of his voice, with the mischievous intention of increasing Mat’s embarrassment.

While Mr. Blyth was attempting to silence Zack by leading him to the supper table, Madonna was trying her best to reassure the great bulky, sunburnt man who seemed absolutely afraid of her! She moved to a stool, which stood near a second table in a corner by the fire-place; and sitting down, produced the pouch, intimating by a gesture that Mat was to look at what she was now doing. She then laid the pouch open on her lap, and put into it several little work-box toys, a silk-reel, an ivory needle case, a silver thimble with an enamelled rim, a tiny pair of scissors, and other things of the same kind—which she took first from one pocket of her apron and then from another. While she was filling the pouch, Zack, standing at the supper-table, drummed on the floor with his foot to attract her attention, and interrogatively held up a decanter of wine and a glass. She started as the sound struck on her delicate nerves; and, looking at young Thorpe directly, signed that she did not wish for any wine. The sudden movement of her body thus occasioned, shook off her lap a little mother-of-pearl bodkin case, which lay more than half out of one of the pockets of her apron. The bodkin case rolled under the stool, without her seeing it, for she was looking towards the supper-table: without being observed by Mat, for his eyes were following the direction of her’s: without being heard by Mr. Blyth, for Zack was, as usual, making a noise.

When she had put two other little toys that remained in her pockets into the pouch, she drew the mouth of it tight, passed the loops of the loose throngs that fastened it, over one of her

arms, and then, rising to her feet, pointed to it, and looked at Mat with a significant nod. The action expressed the idea she wished to communicate, plainly: "See," it seemed to say, "see what a pretty work-bag I can make of your pouch!"

But Mat, to all appearance, was not able to find out the meaning of one of her gestures, easy as they were to interpret. His senses seemed to grow more perturbed the longer he looked at her. As she courtseyed to him again, and moved away in despair, he stepped forward, and awkwardly held out his hand. "The big man seems getting less afraid," thought Madonna, turning directly, and meeting his clumsy advance towards her, with a smile. But the instant he took her hand, her lips closed, and she shivered through her whole body, as if dead fingers had touched her. "Oh!" she thought, "how cold his hand is! how cold his hand is!"

"If I hadn't felt her warm to touch, I should have been dreaming that I'd seen Mary's ghost." This grim fancy troubled Mat, at the moment Madonna was thinking how cold his hand was. He turned away impatiently; and, looking into the fire, drew his coat-cuff over his eyes.

The chill from the strange man's hand still lingered about Madonna's fingers, and made her anxious, though she hardly knew why, to leave the room. She advanced to Valentine, and made the sign which indicated Mrs. Blyth, by laying her hand on her heart; she then pointed upstairs. Valentine, understanding, gave her leave directly to return to his wife. Before Zack could detain her, she had slipped out of the studio, after not having remained in it longer than five minutes.

"Zack," whispered Blyth, as the door closed, "I am anything but pleased with you for bringing Madonna downstairs. You have broken through all rule in doing so; and confused your friend by introducing her to him without any warning."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," interrupted young Thorpe. "He's not the man to want warning. I apologise for breaking rules; but as for Mat—why, hang it, Blyth, it's plain what has been wrong with him since supper came in! He's fairly knocked up with doing Hercules. You have kept the old Guy for near two hours standing in one position, without a rag on his back; and then you wonder——"

"Bless my soul! that never occurred to me. I'm afraid you're

right," exclaimed Valentine. "Do let us make him take something hot! Dear me! how ought one to mix grog?"

Mr. Blyth had been for some time trying his best to compound a species of fiery Squaw's Mixture for Mat. He had begun the attempt some minutes before Madonna left the studio; having found it useless to offer any explanations to his inattentive guest of the meaning of the girl's signs and gestures with the slate and pouch. He had persevered in his hospitable endeavour all through the whispered dialogue which had just passed between Zack and himself; and he had now filled the glass nearly to the brim, when it suddenly occurred to him that he had put sherry in at the top of the tumbler, after having begun with brandy at the bottom; also that he had altogether forgotten some important ingredient which he was perfectly incapable of calling to mind.

"Here, Mat!" cried Zack. "Come and mix yourself something hot. Blyth's been trying to do it for you, and can't."

Mat, who had been staring vacantly into the fire, turned towards his friends at the supper table. He started when he saw that Madonna was no longer in the room—then looked aside to the bureau. He had been determined to get possession of the Hair Bracelet from the first: he was doubly determined now.

"It's no use looking about for the young lady," said Zack; "you frightened her out of the room."

"No! no! nothing of the sort," interposed Valentine. "Pray take something to warm you. I am quite ashamed of my want of consideration in keeping you standing so long, when I ought to have remembered that you were not used to being a painter's model. I hope I have not given you cold——"

"Given me cold?" repeated Mat, amazedly. He seemed about to assert his superiority to any such weakness as a liability to catch cold—but as the words were on his lips, he looked at Mr. Blyth, and checked himself.

"I am afraid you must be tired with the long sitting you have so kindly given me," added Valentine.

"No," answered Mat, after consideration; "not tired. Only sleepy. I'd best go home. What's o'clock?"

A reference to young Thorpe's watch showed that it was ten minutes past ten. Mat held out his hand to take leave; but Valentine refused to let him depart until he had helped himself

from the supper-table. Hearing this, he poured out a glass of brandy, then held out his hand once more.

"Well, I won't press you to stay against your will," said Mr. Blyth, rather mournfully. "I will only thank you for your kindness in sitting to me, and say that I hope to see you again mother and your promises, and call on Mr. Strather in good time to-morrow, and stick to your work, Zack—for all our sakes, stick to your work!"

As they left, Mat cast one parting glance at the garden door. Would the servant, who had most likely bolted and locked it early in the evening, go near it again, before she went to bed? Would Mr. Blyth walk to the bottom of the room to see that the door was safe, after he had raked the fire out?

A little way down Kirk Street, at the end of which Zack and his friend entered in on returning from Mr. Blyth's, stood the local theatre—ablaze with dazzling gas. Young Thorpe stopped as he and his companion passed under the portico, on the way to their lodgings further up the street.

"It's only half-past ten," he said. "I shall drop in and see the last scenes of the pantomime. Won't you come too?"

"No," said Mat; "I'm too sleepy. I shall go on home."

They separated. While Zack entered the theatre, Mat proceeded in the direction of the tobacco shop. As soon, however, as he was out of the glare of gas from the theatre door, he crossed the street; and, returning by the opposite side of the way, took the road that led back to Valentine's house.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HAIR BRACELET.

Mr. Blyth's spirits sank as he bolted and locked the front door; when his guests had left. He sighed as he took a turn or two alone, up and down the studio.

Three times did he approach the garden door, as he walked from end to end of the room. But he never looked up at it. His thoughts were wandering after Zack, and Zack's friend; and his attention was keeping them company. "Whoever this Mat may be," mused Valentine, walking up to the fire-place, "I don't believe there's anything bad about him; and so I shall tell Mrs. Thorpe."

He set himself to rake out the fire, leaving only a few red embers in the bottom of the grate. Having done this, he stood and warmed himself for a little while, and tried to whistle a favourite tune. The attempt was a failure. He broke down at the third bar, and ended in another sigh.

"What can be the matter with me? I never felt so miserable about going away from home before." Puzzling himself with such reflections as these, he went to the supper-table and drank a glass of wine, picked a bit of a sandwich, and unnecessarily spoilt the appearance of two sponge cakes, by absently breaking a small piece off each of them. He was in no better humour for eating and drinking than for whistling; so he determined to light his candle and go to bed.

After distinguishing the lights burning on the table, he cast a parting glance round the room, and was about to leave it, when the drawing which he had taken down for Mat to look at, and had placed on a stand at the lower end of the studio, caught his eye. He advanced towards it—stopped half-way—yawned—thought to himself that it was not worth while to trouble about hanging the drawing over the garden door, that night—and yawning again, left the studio.

Mr. Blyth's servants slept up stairs. About ten minutes after their master had ascended to his bed-room, they left the kitchen for their dormitory. Patty, the housemaid, stopped as she passed the painting-room, to look in, and see that the lights were out. Polly, the cook, went on with the bedroom candle; and, having descended the stairs as far as the first landing, be-thought herself of the garden door, the superintendence of which was attached to her department.

"I say, did you lock the garden door?" said Polly to Patty through the banisters.

"Yes; when I took up tea," said Patty to Polly, appearing in the hall, after one sleepy look round the studio.

"Hadn't you better make sure?" suggested the cautious cook.

"Hadn't you? It's your place," retorted the housemaid.

"Hush!" whispered Valentine, appearing on the landing above Polly, from his bedroom, arrayed in his dressing-gown. "Don't talk here, or you'll disturb your mistress. Go up to bed and talk there. Good night."

"Good night, sir," answered the two faithful dependents of

the house of Blyth, deferring to a future opportunity all further considerations connected with the garden door.

The fire was fading out fast in the studio grate. Now and then, at intervals, a thin tongue of flame leapt up faintly against the ever-invading gloom, flickered for an instant over the brighter and more prominent objects in the room, then dropped back into darkness. The silence was only interrupted by those weird house-noises which live in the death of night and die in the life of day; by that sudden crackling in the wall, by that mysterious creaking in the furniture, by those still small ghostly sounds from inanimate bodies, which we have all been startled by, over and over again, while lingering at our book after the rest of the family are asleep in bed, or while watching alone in a sick chamber. Excepting such occasional noises as these, so familiar, yet always so strange, the tranquillity of the studio remained undisturbed for nearly an hour after Mr. Blyth had left it. The watch-dog in the nurseryman's garden hard by, was as quiet on this particular night as if he had barked himself dumb at last. Outside the house, as well as inside, the drowsy reign of old primeval Quiet was undisturbed by the innovating vagaries of the rebel, Noise.

Undisturbed, till the clock in the hall pointed to a quarter, past eleven. Then there came softly up the iron stairs that led from the back garden to the studio, a sound of footsteps. When these ceased the door at the lower end of the room was opened gently from outside, and the black, bulky figure of Mat appeared on the threshold.

He stepped into the paint-room, and closed the door quietly; stood listening in the darkness for a moment; then pulling from his pocket the wax taper and matches he had bought that afternoon, provided himself with a light.

While the wick of the taper was burning up, he listened again. Except the sound of his own breathing, all was quiet. He advanced to the bureau, starting as he brushed by Mr. Blyth's lay figure with the Spanish hat and the Roman toga; and cursing it under his breath for standing in his way, as if it had been a living creature. The door leading from the studio into the passage was not quite closed; but he never noticed this as he passed to the bureau, though it stood close to the chink left between the door and the post. He had the false key in his hand; he knew that he should be in possession of the Hair Bracelet in another

moment; and, his impatience getting the better of his cunning, he pounced on the bureau, without looking either to the right or the left.

He had unlocked it, had pulled open the inner drawer, had taken out the Hair Bracelet, and was just examining it closely by the light of his taper, after having locked the bureau again, when a faint sound on the staircase of the house caught his ear.

At the same instant, a thin streak of candle-light flashed through the narrow chink between the hardly-closed door and the door-post. It increased rapidly in intensity, as the sound of softly-advancing footsteps now grew more and more distinct from the stone passage leading to the interior of the house.

He had presence of mind to extinguish his taper, to thrust the Hair Bracelet into his pocket, and to move softly from the bureau (which stood against the lock-side door-post) to the wall (which was by the hinge-side door-post); so that the door itself might open back upon him, and thus keep him concealed from the view of any person entering. He had the presence of mind to take these precautions instantly; but he had not self-control enough to suppress the involuntary exclamation which burst from his lips, at the moment when the thin streak of candle-light first flashed into his eyes. A violent spasmodic action contracted the muscles of his throat. He clenched his fist in a fury of suppressed rage against himself, as he felt that his own voice had betrayed him.

The light came closer: the door opened—opened gently, till it just touched him as he stood with his back against the wall.

For one instant his heart stopped; the next, it burst into action again with a heave, and the blood rushed hotly through every vein as his wrought-up nerves relaxed under a sense of ineffable relief. He was saved almost by a miracle from the inevitable consequence of the rash exclamation that escaped him. It was Madonna who had opened the door—it was the deaf and dumb girl walking into the studio.

She had been taking her working materials out of the pouch in her room before going to bed, and had missed her mother-of-pearl bodkin-case. Suspecting that she must have dropped it in the studio, and fearing that it might be trodden on if left there until the morning, she had stolen downstairs to look for it. Her hair, not yet put up for the night, was combed back from her face, and hung over her shoulders. Her complexion looked

more pure than ever, set off as it was by the white dressing-gown which clothed her. She had a pretty little china candlestick, given to her by Mrs. Blyth, in her hand; and, holding the light above her, advanced slowly from the doorway, with eyes bent on the ground, searching for the missing bodkin-case.

Mat's resolution was taken the moment he caught sight of her. He never stirred an inch until she had advanced three or four paces into the room, and had her back turned upon him. Then stepping a little forward, but keeping well behind her, he blew out her candle, just as she was raising it over her head, and looking intently on the floor.

He had calculated rightly, on being able to execute this manœuvre, knowing that she was incapable of hearing the sound of his breath when he blew her candle out, and that the darkness would not only shield him from detection, but also oblige her to leave him alone in the room, while she went to get another light. He had not calculated, however, on the effect which the success of his stratagem would have upon her nerves, for he knew nothing of the horror which the loss of her sense of hearing caused her to feel when she was left in darkness; and he had not stopped to consider that by depriving her of her light, he was depriving her of that all-important guiding sense of sight, the loss of which she could not supply in the dark, as others could, by the exercise of the ear.

The instant he blew her candle out she dropped the china candlestick in terror. It fell, and broke, with a deadened sound, on one of the many portfolios lying on the floor. He had hardly time to hear this before the dumb moaning, the inarticulate cry of fear which was all that the poor panic-stricken girl could utter, rose low, shuddering, and ceaseless, in the darkness—so close at his ear, that he fancied he could feel her breath palpitating quick and warm on his cheek.

If she should touch him. If she should be sensible of the motion of his foot on the floor, as she had been sensible of the motion of Zack's. It was a risk to remain still—it was a risk to move! He stood as helpless, as the helpless creature near him. That ceaseless, dumb moaning, smote so painfully on his heart, roused up so fearfully the rude superstitious fancies lying within him, in connection with the lost and dead Mary Grice, that the sweat broke out on his face, the fever of unutterable expectation parched his throat, and for the first time, perhaps,

in his existence, he felt the chillness of mortal dread running through him to his very soul—he, who amid perils of seas and wildernesses, and horrors of hunger and thirst, had played familiarly with his own life for more than twenty years, as a child plays with an old toy.

He knew not how long it was before the moaning seemed to grow fainter; to be less fearfully close to him; to change into what sounded, at one moment, like a shivering of her whole body; at another, like a rustling of her garments; at a third, like a slow, scraping of her hands over the table on the other side of her, and of her feet over the floor. She had summoned courage at last to move, and to grope her way out. He heard her touch the edge of the half-opened door; he heard her first footfall on the stone passage outside; then the noise of her hand drawn along the wall; then the lessening gasps of her affrighted breathing as she gained the stairs.

When she was gone, and the change and comfort of silence and solitude stole over him, his power of thinking, his cunning and resolution began to return. Listening a little while, and hearing no disturbance among the sleepers in the house, he ventured to light one of his matches; and, by the brief flicker it afforded, picked his way noiselessly through the lumber in the studio, and gained the garden door. In a minute he was out again in the open air. In a minute more, he had got over the garden wall, and was walking along the lonely road, with the Hair Bracelet in his pocket.

At first, he did not attempt to take it out and examine it. He had not felt the slightest scruple beforehand; he did not feel the slightest remorse now, in connection with the Bracelet, and his manner of obtaining it. Callous, however, as he was in this direction, he was sensitive in another. There was both regret and repentance in him, as he thought of the deaf and dumb girl, and of the terror he had caused her. How patiently and prettily she had tried to explain to him her gratitude for his gift, and the use she meant to put it to; and how cruelly he had made her suffer in return! "I wish I hadn't frightened her so," said Mat to himself, thinking of this in his rough way, as he walked homewards. "I wish I hadn't frightened her so."

But his impatience to examine the Bracelet got the better of his repentance, as it had already got the better of every other thought and feeling in him. He stopped and drew his prize out

of his pocket. He could see that it was of two kinds of hair, and that something was engraved on the flat gold of the clasp. But his hand shook, his eyes were dimmer than usual, and he could make out nothing clearly.

He put the bracelet into his pocket again, and made for Kirk Street at his utmost speed. His landlord's wife happened to be in the passage when he opened the door. Without a single preliminary word, he astonished her by taking her candle out of her hand, and disappearing up stairs with it. Zack had not come from the theatre—he had the lodgings to himself—he could examine the Hair Bracelet in freedom.

His first look was at the clasp. By holding it close to the candle, he succeeded in reading the letters engraved on it.

"M. G. In memory of S. G."

"Mary Grice. In memory of Susan Grice." Mat's hand closed fast on the Bracelet, as he uttered those words.

The pantomime which Zack had gone to see, was so lengthened out by encores of incidental songs and dances, that it was not over till midnight. When he left the theatre, the physical consequences of breathing a vitiated atmosphere made themselves felt immediately in the regions of his mouth, throat, and stomach. Ardent aspirations in the direction of shell-fish and malt liquor overcame him as he issued into the fresh air, and took him to the local oyster shop for refreshment.

It was a surprise to him not to hear his friend snoring when he let himself into the passage, but his surprise rose to blank astonishment when he entered the front room, and saw the employment on which his fellow lodger was engaged.

Mat was sitting by the table, with his rifle across his knees, and was scouring the barrel with sand-paper. By his side was an unsnuffed candle, an empty bottle, and a tumbler with a little raw brandy left in the bottom of it. His face, when he looked up, showed that he had been drinking hard. There was a stare in his eyes that was fierce and vacant, and a hard, fixed, unnatural smile on his lips which Zack did not like.

"Why, Mat, old boy!" he said, "you look out of sorts. What's wrong?"

Mat scoured away at the barrel of the gun and gave no answer.

"What, in the name of wonder, can you be scouring your rifle

for?" continued young Thorpe. "You have never touched it since you brought it into the house. What can you want with it now? We don't shoot birds with bullets."

"A rifle bullet will do for my game, if I put it up," said Mat, fiercely fixing his eyes on Zack.

"What game does he mean?" thought young Thorpe. "He's been drinking himself nearly drunk. Can anything have happened since we parted at the theatre? I should like to find out; but he's such a savage when the brandy's in his head, that I don't like to question him—"

Here Zack's reflections were interposed by the voice of his eccentric friend.

"Did you ever meet with a man of the name of Carr?" asked Mat. He looked away from young Thorpe, rubbing hard at the barrel, as he put this question.

"No," said Zack. "Not that I can remember."

Mat left off cleaning the gun, and began to fumble in his pockets. After some time, he produced what appeared to Zack to be an inordinately long letter, written in a cramped hand, and superscribed with two lines of inscription, instead of an address. Opening this document, Mat guided himself down the lines on the first page with a very unsteady forefinger—stopped, and read somewhat anxiously and with evident difficulty—then put the letter back in his pocket, dropped his eyes once more on the gun in his lap, and said with a strong emphasis on the Christian name:—

"Arthur Carr?"

"No," returned Zack. "I never met a man of that name."

Mat went on scouring the rifle barrel.

Young Thorpe said nothing more. He had been puzzled early in the evening, when his friend had exhibited the fan and pouch (neither of which had been produced before), and had mentioned to Mr. Blyth that they were intended for "a woman" who was dead. Zack had thought this conduct rather odd; but now, when it was followed by these abrupt references to the name of Carr, by this mysterious scouring of the rifle and desperate brandy drinking in solitude, he began to feel perplexed about Mat's behaviour. "Is this about Arthur Carr a secret of the old boy's?" Zack asked himself with curiosity. "Is he letting out more than he ought, now he's a little in liquor?"

While young Thorpe was pondering thus, Mat was still indus-

triously scouring the barrel of his rifle. After the silence in the room had lasted some minutes, he spoke again.

"Zack," he said, smacking the stock of his rifle, "me and you had some talk once about going away to the wild country over the waters together. I'm ready to sail when you are, if—" He had glanced up at young Thorpe with his vacant bloodshot eyes, as he spoke. But he checked himself at the same moment, and looked away quickly at the gun.

"If what?" asked Zack.

"If I can lay my hands first on Arthur Carr," answered Mat, with unusual lowness of tone. "Let me do that, and I shall be game to tramp it at an hour's notice. He may be dead for anything I know—"

"Then what's the use of looking after him?" interposed Zack.

"The use is, I've got it into my head that he's alive, and that I shall find him," returned Mat.

"Well?" said young Thorpe eagerly.

Mat became silent again. His head dropped forward, and his body followed it till he rested his elbows on the gun. Sitting in this crouched-up position, he abstractedly began to amuse himself by snapping the lock of the rifle. Zack, suspecting that the brandy he had swallowed was beginning to stupefy him, determined to rouse him into talking.

"What the devil is all this about?" he cried. "Ever since you pulled out that fan and pouch at Blyth's—"

"Well, what of them?" interrupted Mat, looking up instantly.

"Nothing particular," pursued Zack, "except that it's odd you never brought them out before; and odder still that you should tell Blyth, and never say a word here to me, about getting them for a woman—"

"What of her?" broke out Mat, rising with flushed face and threatening eyes.

"Nothing but what a friend out to say," replied Zack, feeling that he had ventured too far. "I'm sorry she never lived to have the presents you meant for her. There's no offence in saying that much, or in asking (after what you yourself told Blyth) whether her death happened lately, or—"

"It happened afore ever you was born."

He gave this answer, which amazed Zack, in a curiously smothered, abstracted tone; as if talking to himself, laying aside

the rifle as he spoke, sitting down by the table, and resting his head on his hand. Young Thorpe took a chair near him, but wisely refrained from saying anything at that moment. Silence seemed to favour the change that was taking place for the better in Mat's temper. He looked up, after awhile, and regarded Zack with wistfulness and anxiety in his swarthy face.

"I like you, Zack," he said, laying one hand on the lad's arm and mechanically stroking his sleeve. "I like you. Don't let us part company. Let's pull together as brotherly as we can." He paused. His hand tightened round young Thorpe's arm; and the hot, dry, tearless look in his eyes began to soften as he added, "I take it kind in you, Zack, saying you were sorry for her just now. She died afore you was born." His hand relaxed its grasp: and when he had repeated those last words, he turned away, and said no more.

Curiosity impelled young Thorpe to hazard another question.

"What she a sweetheart of yours?" he asked, unconsciously sinking his voice to a whisper, "or a relation, or—"

"Kin to me," said Mat quickly, yet not impatiently; reaching out his hand again to Zack's arm without looking up.

"Was she your mother?"

"No."

"Sister?"

"Yes."

For a minute Zack was silent. As soon as he began to speak again, his companion shook his arm impatiently and stopped him.

"Drop it," said Mat. "Talk no more, my head—"

"Anything wrong with your head?" asked Zack.

Mat rose to his feet again. A change began to appear in his face. The flush that had tinged it from the first, deepened and spread up to the very rim of his skull-cap. A dimness seemed stealing over his eyes, a thickness and heaviness impeding his articulation when he spoke again.

"I've overdone it with the brandy," he said, "my head's getting hot under the place where they scalped me. Show a light, Zack. I can't stop in doors no longer. Don't talk. Let me out of the house at once."

Young Thorpe took up the candle; and leading the way down stairs, let him out into the street by the private door, not venturing to irritate him by saying anything, but waiting on the

door-step, and watching him as he started for his walk. He was just getting out of sight when Zack heard him stop, and strike his stick on the pavement. In a minute he had turned, and was back again at the door of the shop.

"Zack," he whispered, "ask among your friends if any ever knew a man with that name I told you of."

"Do you mean the 'Arthur Carr' you were talking about just now?" inquired young Thorpe.

"Yes; Arthur Carr," said Mat, earnestly. Then, turning away he disappeared rapidly in the darkness of the street.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEARCH FOR ARTHUR CARR.

Mr. Blyth was astir betimes on the morning after Mat and young Thorpe had visited him. Determined not to give way to his reluctance to leave home, he packed up his brushes and colours, and started on his portrait-painting tour by the early train he had originally settled to travel by.

When Mr. Blyth's cook descended in the morning to air the studio, by opening the garden door, she was not a little amazed to find that, although it was closed, it was neither bolted nor locked. She communicated this circumstance reproachfully to the housemaid, who answered, indignantly, as was natural, by reiterating her assertion of the past night, that she had secured the door properly at six in the evening, Polly, appealing to contradictory visible fact, rejoined that the thing was impossible. Patty, holding fast to affirmatory personal knowledge, retorted that the thing had been done. Upon this, the two had a quarrel—followed by a sulky silence—succeeded by a reconciliation—terminated by a resolution to say nothing more about the matter, and especially to abstain from breathing a word to the authorities above stairs. Thus neither Valentine nor his wife knew anything of the suspicious appearance presented that morning by the garden door.

But, though Mrs. Blyth was ignorant on this point, she was well enough informed on another of equal importance. While her husband was down-stairs taking his breakfast, Madonna came into her room; and communicated the particulars of the fright she had suffered, while looking for her bodkin-case in the studio. How her candle could possibly have gone out, as it

did in an instant, she could not say. She was sure nobody was in the room when she entered it; and she felt no draught of wind in any direction—in short, she knew nothing of her own experience, but that her candle suddenly went out; that she remained for a time, half dead with fright, in the darkness; and that she then managed to grope her way back to her bedroom, in which a night-light was burning.

Mrs. Blyth followed the progress of this strange story on Madonna's fingers with great interest; and then—after suggesting that the candle might have gone out through some defect in the make of it, or might have been extinguished by a puff of air which the girl was too occupied in looking for her bodkin-case to attend to—earnestly charged her not to say a word to Valentine, when she went to help him in packing his painting materials. "He is nervous already, at the idea of leaving home," thought Mrs. Blyth; "and if he heard the story about the candle going out, it would make him more uneasy still." To explain this to Madonna was to ensure her discretion. She accordingly kept her adventure so profound a secret from Mr. Blyth, that he no more suspected what had happened to her, than he suspected what had happened to the Hair Bracelet, when he hastily assured himself that he was leaving his bureau properly locked, by trying the lid of it the last thing before going away.

Such were the circumstances under which Valentine left home. He was not, however, the only traveller of the reader's acquaintance, whose departure from London took place on the morning after the mysterious extinguishing of Madonna's light in the painting-room. By a coincidence, it so happened that when Mr. Blyth was journeying in one direction, to paint portraits, Mr. Matthew Marksman (now recognisable as Mr. Matthew Grice) was journeying in another, to pay a second visit to Dibbledean.

When young Thorpe and he met on the morning after that conversation, he was aware that his overdose of brandy had set him talking in a very unguarded manner; and desired Zack, as bluntly as usual, to repeat to him all that he had let out. After this request had been complied with, he volunteered no additional confidences. He simply said that what had slipped from his tongue was the truth; but that he could add nothing, and explain nothing, until he had discovered whether "Arthur Carr"

were alive. On being asked how he intended to discover this, he answered that he was going into the country to make the attempt that morning; and that, if he succeeded, he would, on his return, tell his fellow-lodger all the latter might wish to know. With this additional promise Zack was left alone in Kirk Street to quiet his curiosity as well as he could, with the reflection that he might hear more about his friend's secrets, when Mat returned.

In order to collect more information on the subject of these secrets than was possessed by Zack, it will be necessary to return to the lodgings in Kirk Street, at that period of the night when Mr. Marksman was alone in the front room holding the Hair Bracelet crumpled up in his hand.

His first glance at the letters on the clasp not only showed him to whom the Bracelet had once belonged, but set at rest in his mind all doubt as to the identity of the young woman, whose face had so impressed him in Mr. Blyth's studio. He was neither logical enough nor legal enough in his reasoning, to see that, although he had found his sister's bracelet in Valentine's bureau, it did not actually follow as a matter of proof—though it might as a matter of suspicion—that he had also found his sister's child in Valentine's house. He was perfectly satisfied that Madonna was what he had suspected her to be from the first—Mary's child.

But to the next questions that he asked himself concerning the girl's unknown father, the answers were not easy. Who was Arthur Carr? Where was he? Was he still alive?

His first suspicion that Valentine might have assumed the name of Arthur Carr, and therefore be the man, was set at rest by another look at the Bracelet. He knew that the lightest in colour, of the two kinds of hair of which it was made, was Carr's, because it resembled the surplus lock sent back by the jeweller, and enclosed in Jane Holdsworth's letter. He made the comparison and discovered the resemblance at a glance. The evidence of his own eyesight was enough for this, was also enough to satisfy him that Arthur Carr's hair was, in colour, the exact opposite of Mr. Blyth's.

Still, though the painter was assuredly not the father, might he not know who the father was? How could he otherwise have got possession of Mary Grice's bracelet and child?

These two questions suggested a third in Mat's mind. Should

he discover himself at once to Mr. Blyth ; and compel him, by fair means or foul, to disclose what he knew ?

No : not at once. That would be playing a desperate and dangerous move in the game, which had best be reserved to the last. Besides, it was useless to think of questioning Mr. Blyth just now—except by the uncertain and indiscreet process of following him into the country—for he had settled to take his departure from London, early the next morning.

But it was now impossible to rest, after what had been already discovered, without beginning, in one direction or another, the attempt to find out Arthur Carr. Mat's purpose of doing this sprang from the strongest of all resolutions—a vindictive resolution. That dangerous part of the man's nature which his life among the savages and his wanderings in wild places had been nurturing for many a year, was beginning to assert itself, now that he had succeeded in penetrating the mystery of Madonna's parentage by the mother's side. Placed in his position, the tender thought of their sister's child would, at this particular crisis, have been uppermost in many men's hearts. The one deadly thought of the villain who had been Mary's ruin was uppermost in Mat's.

He pondered but a while on the course that he should pursue before the idea of returning to Dibbledean, and compelling Joanna Grice to tell more than she had told at their interview, occurred to him. He disbelieved the passage in her narrative which stated that she had seen and heard nothing of Arthur Carr in all the years that had elapsed since the flight of her niece : he had his own conviction, or rather his own presentiment (which he had mentioned to Zack), that the man was still alive ; and he felt confident that he had it in his power to awe the old woman into confessing everything that she knew. To Dibbledean, therefore, he resolved to go.

If he failed there in finding any clue to the object of his inquiry, he determined to repair next to Rubbleford, and to address himself to Mrs. Peckover. He remembered that, when Zack had first mentioned her extraordinary behaviour about the Hair Bracelet in Mr. Blyth's hall, he had prefaced his words by saying, that she knew apparently as much of Madonna's history as the painter did ; and that she kept that knowledge close and secret. This woman, therefore, doubtless possessed information which she might be entrapped into communicating. There

would be no difficulty about finding where she lived; for, on the evening when he had mimicked her, young Thorpe had said that she kept a dairy and muffin-shop at Rubbleford. To that town, then, he proposed to journey, in the event of failing at Dibbledean.

And if, by chance, he should ascertain no more from Mrs. Peckover than from Joanna Grice, what course should he take next? There would be nothing then, but to return to London to discover himself to Mr. Blyth, come what might, with the Hair Bracelet to vouch for him in his hand.

These were his thoughts, as he sat alone in Kirk Street. At night, they had ended in the fatal consolation of the brandy bottle—in the desperate and solitary excess, which had so cheated him of his self-control, that the lurking taint which his life among the savages had left in his disposition, and the deadly rancour which his recent discovery of his sister's fate had stored up in his heart, escaped from concealment, and betrayed themselves in that half-drunken, half-sober occupation of scouring the rifle-barrel, which it had so amazed Zack to witness, and which the lad had so suddenly suspended by his words of sympathizing reference to Mary's death.

But, in the morning, Mat's head was clear, and his dangerous instincts were once more under cunning control. In the morning, therefore, he declined explaining himself to young Thorpe, and started for the country by the first train.

On being set down at the Dibbledean Station, Mat lingered and looked about him, just as he had lingered and looked on his first visit. He subsequently took the same road to the town which he had then taken; and, on gaining the church, stopped, as formerly, at the churchyard-gate.

This time, however, he seemed to have no intention of passing the entrance—no intention of doing anything, unless standing vacantly by the gate, and mechanically swinging it backwards and forwards, can be considered an occupation. As for the churchyard, he hardly looked at it. There were two or three people, at a little distance, walking about among the graves; but he never took the smallest notice of them. He was evidently meditating about something, for he soon began to talk to himself—being, like most men, who have passed much time in solitude, in the habit of thinking aloud.

"I wonder how many year ago it is since she and me used

to swing on this," he said, still pushing the gate slowly to and fro. "The hinges used to creak then. They go smoothly enough now. Oiled, I suppose." As he said this, he moved his hands from the bar on which they rested, and turned to go on to the town; but stopped, and, walking back to the gate, looked at its hinges—"Ah!" he said, "not oiled. New."

"New," he repeated, walking slowly towards the High Street—"new since my time, like everything else here. I wish I'd never come back—I wish to God I'd never come back!"

On getting into the town, he stopped at the same place where he had halted on his first visit to Dibbledean, to look up again, as he had looked then, at the hosier's shop which had once belonged to Joshua Grice. Here, those visible and tangible signs and tokens which he required to stimulate his sluggish memory, were not very easy to recognise. Though the general form of his father's old house was still preserved, the re-painting and renovating of the front had somewhat altered it, in its individual parts, to his eyes. He looked up and down at the gables, and all along from window to window, and shook his head.

"New again here," he said. "I can't make out which winder it was Mary and me broke between us, when I come away from school, the year afore I went to sea. Whether it was Mary that broke the winder, and me that took the blame," he continued, slowly pursuing his way—"or whether it was her that took the blame, and me that broke the winder, I can't call to mind. And no great wonder neither, if I've forgot such a thing as that, when I can't even fix it for certain whether she used to wear her Hair Bracelet or not, while I was at home."

Communing with himself in this way, he reached the turning that led to Joanna Grice's cottage.

His thoughts had thus far been straying idly to the past. They were now recalled abruptly to present emergencies by certain unexpected appearances which met his eye, the moment he looked down the lane along which he was walking.

He remembered this place as having struck him by its loneliness, on his first visit to Dibbledean. He now observed with surprise that it was astir with human beings, and noisy with the clamour of gossiping tongues. All the inhabitants of the cottages were in their front gardens. All the towns-people who ought to have been walking about the principal streets seemed

to be congregated in this one narrow little lane. What were they assembled here to do? What subject was it that men and women—and even children—were all talking about?

Without questioning anybody, without appearing to notice that he was stared at, as if he were walking about among a breeched and petticoated people in the character of a savage with nothing but war paint on him, Mat steadily pursued his way to Joanna Grice's cottage. "Time enough," thought he, "to find out what all this means, when I've got into the house I'm bound for." As he approached the cottage, he saw, standing at the gate, what looked, to his eyes, like two coaches—one, very strange in form: both very remarkable in colour. All about the coaches stood solemn-looking gentlemen; and all about the solemn-looking gentlemen, circled excitably, the whole vagabond boy-and-girl population of Dibbledean.

Amazed by what he saw, Mat hastened to the cottage. Just as he arrived at the garden, the door opened, and from the inside of the dwelling there protruded into the open air a coffin carried on four men's shoulders, and covered with a pall.

Mat stopped the moment he saw the coffin, and struck his hand violently on the paling by his side. "Dead!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"A friend of the late Miss Grice's?" asked a voice near.

He did not hear. All his attention was fixed on the coffin, as it was borne slowly over the garden path. Behind it walked two gentlemen, mournfully arrayed in black cloaks and hat-bands. They carried white handkerchiefs in their hands, and used them to wipe—not their eyes—but their lips, on which the balmy dews of recent wine-drinking glistened gently.

"Dix, and Nawby—the medical attendant of the deceased, and the solicitor who is her sole executor," said the voice near Mat, in tones which had ceased to be inquisitive, and had become explanatory instead. "That's Millbury, the undertaker, and Gutteridge of the White Hart Inn, his brother-in-law, who supplies the refreshments, which makes a regular job of it," continued the voice, as two red-faced gentlemen followed the doctor and the lawyer. "Something like a funeral! Not a halfpenny less than forty pound, when it's all paid for. Beautiful, ain't it?" concluded a voice, becoming inquisitive again.

Still Mat kept his eyes fixed on the funeral proceedings in front, and took no notice of the pertinacious speaker.

When Mary Grice died, a fugitive and an outcast, the clown's wife and the Irish girl who rode in the circus wept for her, stranger though she was, as they followed her coffin to the poor corner of the churchyard. When Joanna Grice died in the place of her birth, among the townspeople with whom her existence had been passed, every eye was tearless that looked on her funeral procession; the two strangers who made part of it, gossiped pleasantly as they rode after the hearse about the news; and the sole surviving member of her family, whom chance had brought to her door on her burial-day, stood aloof from the hired mourners, and moved not a step to follow.

No: not a step. The hearse rolled on slowly towards the churchyard, and the sight-seers followed it; but Matthew Grice stood by the garden paling, at the place where he had halted from the first. What was her death to him? Nothing but the loss of his first chance of tracing Arthur Carr. Tearlessly she had left it to strangers to bury her brother's daughter; and now, tearlessly there stood her brother's son, leaving it to strangers to bury her.

"Don't you mean to follow to the churchyard?" inquired the inquisitive voice, which had twice endeavoured to attract Mat's attention.

He turned round this time to look at the speaker, and confronted a wizen, flaxen-haired, sharp-faced man, dressed in a shooting-jacket, carrying a riding-cane, and having a terrier in attendance at his heels.

"Excuse me asking the question," said the wizen man; "but I noticed how dumbfounded you were when you saw the coffin come out. 'A friend of the deceased,' I thought to myself—"

"Well," interrupted Mat, "suppose I am; what then?"

"Will you oblige me by putting this in your pocket?" asked the wizen man, giving Mat a card. "My name's Tatt, and I've recently started in practice here as a solicitor. I don't want to ask any improper questions, but, being a friend of the deceased, you may perhaps have some claim on the estate; in which case I should feel proud to take care of your interests. It isn't strictly professional to be touting for the chance of a client; but I'm obliged to do it in self-defence. Dix, Nawby, Millbury, and Gutteridge, all play into one another's hands, and want to monopolise among 'em the whole Doctoring, Lawyering, Undertaking, and Licensed Victualling business of Dibble-

dean. I've made up my mind to break down Nawby's monopoly, and keep as much business out of his office as I can. That's why I give you my card." Here Mr. Tatt left off explaining, and began to play with his terrier.

Mat looked up thoughtfully at Joanna Grice's cottage. Might she not have left important letters? And, if he mentioned who he was, could not the wizen man help him to get them?

"A deal of mystery about the late Miss Grice," resumed Mr. Tatt, still playing with the terrier. "Nobody but Dix and Nawby can tell exactly when she died, or how she's left her money. Queer family. (Rats, Pincher! where are the rats?) There's a son of old Grice's, who has never been properly accounted for. (Hie, boy! there's a cat! hie after her, Pincher!) If he was only to turn up now, it would put such a spoke in Nawby's wheel—"

"I may have a question or two to ask you one day," interposed Mat, turning away from the garden paling at last. While his new acquaintance had been speaking, he had been making up his mind that he should best serve his purpose of tracing Arthur Carr, by endeavouring forthwith to get all the information that Mrs. Peckover might be able to afford. In the event of this proving useless, there would be plenty of time to return to Dibbledean, discover himself to Mr. Tatt, and ascertain whether the law would not give to Joshua Grice's son the right of examining Joanna Grice's papers.

"Come to my office," cried Mr. Tatt, enthusiastically. "I can give you a prime bit of Stilton, and as good a glass of bitter beer as ever you drank in your life."

Mat declined this hospitable invitation, and set forth on his return to the station. All Mr. Tatt's efforts to engage him for an "early day" failed. He would only repeat, doggedly, that at some future time he might have a question to ask about a matter of law, and that his new acquaintance should then be the man to whom he would apply for information.

They wished each other "good morning"—Mr. Tatt lounging up the High Street, his terrier at his heels, and Mat walking rapidly on his way back to the railway station.

As he passed the churchyard, the funeral procession arrived at its destination, and the bearers were carrying the coffin from the hearse to the church door. He stopped by the road-side to see it go in. "She was no good to anybody about her, all

her lifetime," he thought bitterly, as the velvet pall was lost to view in the darkness of the church entrance. "But if she'd only lived a day or two longer, she might have been of some good to me. There's more of what I wanted to know nailed down along with her in that coffin, than ever I'm likely to find out anywhere else. It's a long hunt, this is—a long hunt on a dull scent; and her death has made it duller."

As he pursued his way back to the railroad, he took Jane Holdsworth's letter out of his pocket, and looked at the hair inclosed in it. It was the fourth or fifth time he had done this during the few hours that had passed since he had possessed himself of Mary's Bracelet. There had grown within him a vague conviction, that the possession of Carr's hair might in some way lead to the discovery of Carr himself. He knew that there was not the slightest present or practical use in examining this hair, and yet, there was something that seemed to strengthen him afresh in his purpose, to encourage him anew after his unexpected check at Dibbledean, merely in the act of looking at it. "If I can't track him no other way," he muttered, replacing the hair in his pocket, "I've got the notion into my head that I shall track him by this."

It was dark by the time he reached Rubbleford. He easily found the dairy and muffin-shop, and saw, to his great delight, that it was not shut up for the night. He looked in at the window, under a plaster cast of a cow, and observed by the light of one tallow candle burning inside, a chubby girl sitting at the counter, drawing something on a slate. Entering the shop he asked if he could see Mrs. Peckover.

"Mother went away, sir, three days ago, to nurse uncle at Bangbury," answered the girl.

(Here was a second check—a second obstacle to defer the tracing of Arthur Carr! It seemed like a fatality!)

"When do you expect her back?" asked Mat.

"Not for a week or ten days, sir," answered the girl.

"Father's up at the rectory, sir," continued the girl, observing that the stranger looked disappointed. "If it's dairy business you come upon, I can attend to it."

"Maybe I shall have a letter to send your mother," said Mat. "Can you write on a bit of paper where she is?"

"Oh, yes, sir," And the girl wrote in her best round hand,

on a slip of bill-paper, this address:—"Martha Peckover, at Rob: Randle, 2 Dawson's Buildings, Bangbury."

Mat absently took the paper, and put it into his pocket; then thanked the girl, and went out. While inside the shop, he had been trying to call to mind where he had heard the name of Bangbury before: the moment he was in the street, remembrance came back to him. Surely, Bangbury was where Joanna Grice had told him that Mary was buried!

After walking a few paces, he came to a large linen-draper's, with plenty of light in the window. Stopping, he drew from his pocket the manuscript containing the old woman's "Justification" of her conduct; for he wished to be certain, and had an idea that the part of the Narrative which mentioned Mary's death would help to decide him in his present doubt.

Yes! there it was: "I sent, by a person I could depend on, money enough to bury her decently in Bangbury churchyard."

"I'll go there," said Mat to himself, thrusting the letter into his pocket, and taking the way back to the railway station.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARY'S GRAVE.

Although Mat left Rubbleford in less than an hour after he had arrived there, he only succeeded in getting half way to Bangbury before he had to stop for the night, and wait at an intermediate station for the first morning train. By this he reached his destination early in the forenoon, and went at once to Dawson's Buildings.

"Mrs. Peckover has just stepped out, sir—Mr. Randle being a little better this morning—for a mouthful of fresh air. She'll be in again in half-an-hour," said the maid-of-all-work.

Mat began to suspect that more than accident was keeping Mrs. Peckover and himself asunder. "I'll come in half-an-hour," he said—then added, as the servant was about to shut the door:—"Which is my way to the church?"

Bangbury church was close at hand. But when he entered the churchyard, and looked about him to see where he should begin searching for his sister's grave, his heart began to fail him. Bangbury was a large town, and rows and rows of tombstones seemed to fill the churchyard in every direction.

At a little distance a man was at work opening a grave, and

to him Mat applied for help; describing his sister as a stranger who had been buried in the churchyard better than twenty years ago. The man was surly, and would give no advice, except that it was useless to look near where he was digging, for they were all respectable townspeople buried about there.

Mat walked round to the other side of the church. Here the graves were thicker than ever; for here the poor were buried. He went on slowly, with eyes fixed on the ground, towards some trees which marked the limits of the churchyard; looking out for a place to begin his search in, where the graves might be comparatively few, and where his head might not get confused at the outset. Such a place he found at last, in a damp corner. About this spot the thin grass languished; the mud distilled into tiny water-pools; and brambles, briars, and dead leaves lay thickly between a few ragged turf-mounds. Could they have laid her here? Could this be the last refuge to which Mary fled from home?

A few of the mounds had stained mouldering tomb-stones at their heads. He looked at these; and finding only strange names on them, turned to the mounds marked by cross-boards of wood. At one of the graves the cross-board had been torn, or had rotted away, from its supports, and lay on the ground weather-stained and split, but still faintly showing that it had once had letters cut in it. He examined this board, and was trying to make out what the letters were, when the sound of some one approaching disturbed him. He looked up, and saw a woman walking towards where he was standing.

It was Mrs. Peckover! She had taken a prescription to the chemist's, and had now stolen a few minutes to look at the grave of Madonna's mother. It was many years since Mrs. Peckover had paid a visit to Bangbury churchyard.

"Do you know whose grave this is?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Mrs. Peckover, glancing indignantly at the broken board. "Yes, sir, I do; and, what's more, it's a disgrace to the parish. Money has been paid twice over to keep it decent; and look what a state it's in!"

"I asked you whose grave it was," repeated Mat.

"A poor, unfortunate, forsaken creature's, who's gone to Heaven if ever an afflicted woman went there yet!" answered Mrs. Peckover, warmly.

"Forsaken? Afflicted? A woman, too?" Mat repeated.

"Yes, forsaken and afflicted," cried Mrs. Peckover, over-hearing him. "Don't you say no ill of her, whoever you are. She shan't be spokenly unkindly of in my hearing, poor soul!"

Mat looked up suddenly. "What's your name?" he inquired.

"My name's Peckover, and I'm not ashamed of it," was the reply. "And, now, if I may make so bold, what's yours?"

Mat took from his pocket the Hair Bracelet, and, fixing his eye intently on her face, held it up, across the grave, for her to look at. "Do you know this?" he said.

Mrs. Peckover stooped forward, and inspected the Bracelet. "Lord save us!" she exclaimed, recognising it, and confronting him with eyes that stared in astonishment. "Lord save us! how did you come by that? And who are you?"

"My name's Matthew Grice," he answered sternly. "This Bracelet belonged to my sister, Mary Grice. She run away from home, and died, and was buried in Bangbury. If you know her grave, tell me in plain words—is it here?"

Breathless as she was with astonishment, Mrs. Peckover managed to stammer a faint answer in the affirmative, and to add that the initials, "M. G.," would be found somewhere on the broken board at their feet. She then tried to ask a question or two in her turn; but the words died away in exclamations of surprise. "To think of me and you meeting!" was all she could say; "her brother, too! Only to think of that!"

Mat looked down at the mud, the brambles, and the rotting grass that lay over what had once been a loving human creature. The dangerous brightness glittered in his eyes, the cold change spread over his cheeks, and the scars of the arrow-wounds began to burn redly, as he whispered to himself—"I'll be even yet, Mary, with the man who laid you here!"

"Does Mr. Blyth know who you are, sir?" asked Mrs. Peckover, hesitating. "Did he give you the Bracelet?"

She stopped. Mat was not listening. His eyes were fastened on the grave: he was still talking to himself.

"Her Bracelet was hid in another man's chest," he said—"I've found her Bracelet. Her child was hid in another man's house—I've found her child. Her grave was hid in a strange churchyard—I've found her grave. The man who laid her in it is hid still—I shall find him!"

"Please do listen to me, sir, for one moment," pleaded Mrs. Peckover, more nervously than before. "Does Mr. Blyth know

about you? And little Mary—oh, sir, whatever you do, pray, pray don't take her away! You can't mean to do that, sir, though you are her own mother's brother? You can't surely?"

He looked up at her so quickly, with such a fierce glitter in his eyes, that she recoiled; still pleading, however, with desperate perseverance for an answer to her last question.

"Only tell me, sir, that you don't mean to take little Mary away, and I won't ask you to say another word! You'll leave her with Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, won't you, sir? For your sister's sake, you'll leave her with the poor bed-ridden lady that's been like a mother to her for so many years?—for your dear, lost sister's sake, that I was with when she died—"

"Tell me about her." He said those words with surprising gentleness, Mrs. Peckover thought, for such a rough man.

"Yes, yes, all you want to know," she answered. "But I can't stop here. There's my brother—I've got such a turn with seeing you, it's almost put him out of my head—there's my brother, that I must go back to, and see if he's asleep still. Come along with me, and wait in the parlour—it's close by—while I step upstairs—" (Here she stopped in great confusion. It seemed like running some desperate risk to ask this strange, stern-featured relation of Mary Grice's into her brother's house.) "And yet," thought Mrs. Peckover, "if I can only soften his heart by telling him about his sister, it may make him all the readier to leave little Mary—"

At this point her perplexities were cut short by Matthew himself, who said, shortly, that he had been to Dawson's Buildings already. On hearing this, she hesitated no longer. It was too late to question the propriety of admitting him now.

"Come away, then," she said; "don't let's wait no longer. And don't fret about the infamous state they've left things in here," she added, thinking to propitiate him, as she saw his eyes turn once more, at parting, on the broken board and the brambles around the grave. "I know who to speak to—"

"Speak to nobody," he broke in sternly to her great astonishment. "What's got to be done I mean to do myself."

"You!"

"Yes, me. It was little enough I did for her while she was alive; and it's little enough now, only to make things look decent about the place where she's buried. But I mean to do that much for her; and no man shall help me."

Rough as it was, this speech made Mrs. Peckover feel easier about Madonna. The hard-featured man was, after all, not so hard-hearted as she had thought him. She even ventured to question him again, as they walked.

He varied very much in his manner of receiving her inquiries, replying to some promptly enough, and gruffly refusing, in the plainest terms, to give a word of answer to others.

He was quite willing to admit that he had procured her address at Bangbury from her daughter; but he flatly declined to inform her how he had first found out that she lived at Rubbleford. Again, he admitted that neither Madonna nor Mr. Blyth knew who he really was; but he refused to say why he had not disclosed himself to them, or when he intended—if he ever intended—to inform them that he was the brother of Mary Grice. As to getting him to confess in what manner he had become possessed of the Bracelet, Mrs. Peckover's first question about it, although only answered by a look, was received in such a manner as to show her that further efforts in that direction would be fruitless.

On one side of the door, at Dawson's Buildings, was Mr. Randle's shop; and on the other was Mr. Randle's little dining-parlour. In this room Mrs. Peckover left Mat, while she went to see if her brother wanted anything. Finding that he was still sleeping, she only waited to arrange the bed-clothes, and to put a hand-bell within his reach in case he should awake, and then went down stairs again.

She found Mat with his elbows on the one little table in the dining-parlour, his head resting on his hands. Upon the table, lying by the side of the Bracelet, was the lock of hair out of Jane Holdsworth's letter, which he had yet once more taken from his pocket to look at. "Why, mercy on me!" cried Mrs. Peckover, glancing at it, "it's the same hair that's in the Bracelet! Wherever did you get that?"

"Never mind where I got it. Do you know whose hair it is? The man this hair belonged to was the man she trusted in—and he laid her in the churchyard for her pains."

"Who was he?" asked Mrs. Peckover, eagerly.

"Who was he?" repeated Matthew. "What do you mean?"

"I only mean that I never heard a word about the villain—I don't so much as know his name."

"You don't?" He fastened his eyes suspiciously on her as he said those two words.

"No; as true as I stand here I don't. Why, I didn't even know that your sister's name was Grice till you told me."

His look of suspicion began to change to a look of amazement as he heard this. He hurriedly gathered up the Bracelet and the lock of hair, and put them into his pocket again.

"Let's hear first how you met with her," he said. "I'll have a word or two about the other matter afterwards."

Mrs. Peckover sat down near him, and began to relate the story she had told to Valentine, and Doctor and Mrs. Joyce, now many years ago. But on this occasion she was not interrupted. While she was speaking the few simple words which told how she had sat down by the road-side, and suckled the half-starved infant of the forsaken and dying Mary Grice, Mat suddenly reached out his heavy, trembling hand, and took hers. He gripped it with such force that, hardy as she was, she cried out in pain, "Oh, don't! you hurt me—you hurt me!"

He dropped her hand directly, and turned his face from her; his breath quickening painfully, his fingers fastening on the side of his chair, as if some great pang of oppression were trying him to the quick. She rose and asked what ailed him; but, even as the words passed her lips, he mastered himself with that iron resolution which few trials could bend, and none break, and motioned to her to sit down again.

"Don't mind me," he said; "I'm old and tough-hearted with being battered about, and I can't give myself vent nohow with talking or crying like you. It's all over now. Go on."

She complied, a little nervously; but he did not interrupt again. He listened while she proceeded, looking straight at her; not speaking or moving—except when he winced once or twice, as a man winces under pain, while Mary's death-bed words were repeated. Having reached this stage of her narrative, Mrs. Peckover added little more; only saying: "I took care of the poor child, as I said I would; and did my best to behave like a mother to her, till she got to be ten year old; then I give her up—for her own good—to Mr. Blyth."

He did not notice the close of the narrative. The forsaken girl, sitting by the road-side, with her child's natural sustenance dried up within her—travel-worn, friendless, and desperate—was uppermost in his mind; and when he next spoke, gratitude for the help given to Mary in her sore distress was the one predominant emotion, which strove roughly to express itself.

"Is there any soul you care about that a trifle of money would do good to?" he asked, with abrupt eagerness.

"Lord bless me!" she exclaimed, "what do you mean? What has that to do with your poor sister?"

"It's got this to do," burst out Matthew, starting to his feet, as gratitude stirred body and soul both together; "you helped Mary when she hadn't nobody to stand by her. She was always father's darling—but father couldn't help her then; and I was away on the wrong side of the sea, and couldn't be no good neither. But I'm on the right side, now; and if there's any friends of yours as would be happier for a trifle of money, here's mine; give it 'em." (He tossed his beaver-skin roll, with the bank-notes in it, into Mrs. Peckover's lap.) "Here's my two hands, that I dursn't take a holt of yours with, for fear of hurting you again; here's my two hands that can work with any man's. Only give 'em something to do for you, that's all! Give 'em something to make or mend, I don't care what—"

"Hush! hush!" interposed Mrs. Peckover; "don't be so noisy, there's a good man! or you'll wake my brother. Where's the use to make such a stir about what I done for your sister? Anybody else would have took as kindly to her, seeing what distress she was in, poor soul! Here," she continued, handing him back the beaver-skin roll; "here's your money, and thank you for the offer of it. Put it up in your pocket again. We manage to keep our heads above water, thank God! and don't want to do no better than that. Put it up in your pocket again, and I'll ask you for something else."

"For what?" inquired Mat, looking her eagerly in the face.

"Just for this: that you'll promise not to take little Mary away from Mr. Blyth. Do, pray do promise me you won't."

"I never thought to take her," he answered. "Where should I take her to? What can a lonesome old vagabond, like me, do for her? If she's happy—let her stop where she is."

"Lord bless you for that!" fervently exclaimed Mrs. Peckover, smiling for the first time, and smoothing out her gown over her knees, with inexpressible relief. "I'm rid of my fright now, and getting to breathe freely, which I haven't once been able to do since I set eyes on you. Ah! you're rough; but you've got feelings like the rest of us. Talk away now as much as you like. Ask me about anything you please—"

"What's the good?" he broke in. "I come down here for

to find out the man as once owned this;”—he pulled the hair out of his pocket again—“and you can’t help me. I didn’t believe it when you first said so, but I do now.”

“Well, thank you for saying that much; though you might have put it civiler—”

“His name was Arthur Carr. Did you never hear tell of anybody with the name of Arthur Carr?”

“No: never—never till this very moment.”

“The Painter-man will know,” continued Mat, talking more to himself than to Mrs. Peckover. “I must go back, and chance it with the Painter-man, after all.”

“Painter-man?” repeated Mrs. Peckover. “Painter? Surely you don’t mean Mr. Blyth?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why, what in the name of fortune can you be thinking of! How should Mr. Blyth know more than me? He never set eyes on Mary till she was ten year old; and he knows nothing about her poor mother except what I told him.”

These words seemed to stupefy Mat: they burst upon him in the shape of a revelation for which he was totally unprepared. It had never occurred to him to doubt that Valentine was informed of all he wished to know. He had looked forward to what the painter might be persuaded—or, in the last resort, forced—to tell, as the one certainty on which he might finally depend; and here was this fancied security exposed as the wildest delusion that ever man trusted in! What resource was left? To return to Dibbledean, and, by the help of Mr. Tatt, to possess himself of any fragments of evidence which Joanna Grice might have left in writing? This seemed a broken reed; and yet nothing else remained.

“I don’t care where he’s hid, I shall find him yet,” thought Mat, holding with desperate obstinacy to his first superstition, in spite of every sign that appeared to confute it.

“Why worrit yourself about finding Arthur Carr at all?” pursued Mrs. Peckover, noticing his mortified expression. “The wretch is dead, most likely, by this time—”

“I’m not dead!” retorted Mat, fiercely; “and you’re not dead; and you and me are as old as him. Don’t tell me he’s dead! I say he’s alive; and, by God, I’ll be even with him!”

“Oh, don’t talk so, don’t! It’s shocking to hear you and see you,” said Mrs. Peckover, recoiling from the expression of his

eye, as she had recoiled from it already over Mary's grave. "Suppose he is alive, why should you go taking vengeance into your own hands after all these years? Your poor sister's happy in heaven; and her child's took care of by the kindest people that ever drew breath in this world. Why should you want to be even with him now? If he hasn't been punished already, I'll answer for it he will be—in the next world, if not in this. Don't talk about it, or think about it any more. Let's be pleasant together again—like we were just now—for Mary's sake. Tell me where you've been all these years. How is it you never turned up before?"

She ended by speaking to him in much the same tone which she would have made use of to soothe a fractious child. But her instinct guided her truly: in venturing on that reference to "Mary," she had not ventured in vain. It quieted him, and turned aside the current of his thoughts. "Didn't she never talk to you about having a brother away aboard ship?" he asked.

"No. She wouldn't say a word about any of her friends. But how did you come to be so long away?—that's what I want to know," said Mrs. Peckover, pertinaciously repeating her question, partly out of curiosity, partly out of desire to keep him from returning to the dangerous subject of Arthur Carr.

"I was alway a bitter bad 'un, I was," said Matthew, meditatively. "There was no keeping of me straight. I bolted from home, I bolted from school, I bolted from aboard ship—"

"Why? What for?"

"Partly because I was a bitter bad 'un, and partly because of a letter I picked up in port, at the Brazils, at the end of a long cruise. Here's the letter—but it's no good showing it to you: the paper's so grimed and tore about, you can't read it."

"Who wrote it? Mary?"

"No: father—saying what had happened to Mary, and telling me not to come back home till things was pulled straight again. Here—here's what he said—under the big grease-spot: 'If you can get continued employment anywhere abroad, accept it instead of coming back. Better for you to be spared the sight of such sorrow as we are suffering.' Do you see that?"

"Yes, yes, I see. Ah! poor man! he couldn't give no kinder nor better advice; and you—"

"Deserted from my ship. The devil was in me to be off on

the tramp, and father's letter did the rest. I got desperate with the thought of what had happened to Mary, and with knowing they were ashamed to see me back again. So the night afore the ship sailed I slipped into a shore-boat, and turned my back on the boatswain's mate for the rest of my life."

"You don't mean to say you've done nothing but wander about in foreign parts from that time to this?"

"I do, though! I'd a notion I should be shot for a deserter if I turned up too soon in my own country. That kep' me away for ever so long, to begin with. Then tramps' fever got into my head; and there was an end of it."

"Tramps' fever! Mercy on me! what do you mean?"

"I mean this: when a man turns gipsy, as I did, and tramps about through cold and hot, and winter and summer, not caring where he goes or what becomes of him, that sort of life ends by getting into his head, just like liquor does—except that it don't get out again. It got into my head. It's in it now. Tramps' fever kep' me away in the wild country. Tramps' fever will take me back there afore long. Tramps' fever will lay me down some day in the lonesome places, with my hand on my rifle and my face to the sky; and I shan't get up again till the crows and vultures come and carry me off piecemeal."

"Lord bless us! how can you talk about yourself in that way?" cried Mrs. Peckover, shuddering at the grim image which Mat's last words suggested. "You're trying to make yourself out worse than you are. Surely you must have thought of your father and sister sometimes—didn't you?"

"Of course I did! But there come a time when I as good as forgot them. They seemed to get smeared out of my head—like we used to smear old sums off our slates at school."

"More shame for you! Whatever else you forgot, you oughtn't to have forgotten—"

"Wait a bit. Father's letter told me that he was a going to look after Mary, and bring her home, and forgive her. He'd done that twice for me, when I run away; so I didn't doubt but what he'd do it for her. She'll pull through her scrape with father just as I used to pull through mine—was what I thought. And so she would, if father's own sister hadn't—" He stopped; the frown gathered on his brow, and the oath burst from his lips, as he thought of Joanna Grice's share in preventing Mary's restoration to her home.

"There! there!" interposed Mrs. Peckover. "Talk about something pleasanter. Let's hear how you come back."

"I can't rightly fix it when Mary first begun to drop out of my head," Mat continued, abstractedly pursuing his previous train of recollections. "I used to think of her often enough, when I started for my run in the wild country. That was the time when I had clear notions about coming back home. I got her a scarlet pouch and another feather plaything then, knowing she was fond of knick-knacks, and making it out in my own mind that we two was sure to meet again. It must have been a longish while after that, afore I got ashamed to go home. But I did get ashamed. Thinks I, I haven't a rap to show after being away all this time. I'm getting summut of a savage already; and Mary would be more frightened than pleased to see me. I'll wait," says I, "and see if I can't keep from tramping about, and try and get a little money, by doing some decent work, afore I go home." I was nigh about a good ten days' march then from any seaport where honest work could be got; but I'd fixed to try, and I did try, and got work in a ship-builder's yard. It wasn't no good. Tramps' fever was in my head; and in two days I was off again to the wild country, with my gun over my shoulder, as damned a vagabond as ever."

Mrs. Peckover held up her hands in amazement. Matthew, without taking notice, went on, partly to her, partly to himself.

"It must have been about that time when Mary and father, and all what had to do with them, begun to drop out of my head. But I kep' them two knick-knacks, which was meant for presents for her—long after I'd lost all notion of ever going home again, I kep' 'em—from first to last I kep' 'em—I can't hardly say why; unless it was that I'd got so used to keeping them that I hadn't the heart to let 'em go. Not, mind ye, but what they mightn't now and then have set me thinking of father and Mary—at times, you know, when I changed 'em from one bag to another, or took and blew the dust off of 'em, for to keep 'em as nice as I could. But the older I got, the worse I got at calling anything to mind in a clear way about the old country. There seemed to be a sort of fog betwixt us now. I couldn't see her face clear, in my mind, no longer. It come upon me once or twice in dreams, when I nodded alone over my fire after a day's march—it come upon me at such times so clear, that it startled me up, all in a cold sweat, puzzled with not knowing at

first whether the stars was shimmering down at me in father's paddock at Dibbledean, or in the lonesome places over the sea, hundreds of miles from any living soul. But that was only dreams. Waking, I was all astray now, whenever I fell a thinking about father or her. The longer I tramped it over the lonesome places, the thicker that fog got which rose up in my mind between me and them at home. At last, it come to darken in altogether, and never lifted no more, that I can remember, till I crossed the seas and got back."

"But how did you ever think of coming back, after all those years?" asked Mrs. Peckover.

"Well, I got a heap of money, for once in a way, digging for gold in California," he answered; "and my mate, he says to me one day:—'I don't see my way to how we are to spend our money, now we've got it, if we stop here. What can we treat ourselves to in this place, excepting bad brandy and cards? Let's go over to the old country, where there ain't nothing we want that we can't get for money; and, when it's all gone, let's work for more.' He wrought upon me till I went back with him. We quarrelled aboard ship; and when we got into port he went his way and I went mine. Not that I started off at once for the old place as soon as I was ashore. That fog in my mind seemed to lift a little when I saw my own country-people's faces again. And then there come a fear over me—a fear of going home at all, after the time I'd been away. I got over it, though, and went. When I first laid my hand on the churchyard gate that Mary and me used to swing on, and when I looked up at the old house, with the gable ends just what they used to be (though the front was new painted, and strange names was over the shop-door)—all my time in the wild country seem to shrivel up, and better than twenty year ago begun to be like yesterday. I'd seen father's name in the churchyard—which was no more than I looked for; but when they told me Mary had never been brought back, when they said she'd died many a year ago among strange people, they cut me to the quick."

"Ah! no wonder, no wonder!"

"It was a wonder to me, though. I should have laughed at any man, if he'd told me I should be took so at hearing what I heard, after the time I'd been away. I couldn't make it out then, and I can't now. I didn't feel like my own man, when I

set eyes on the old place. And then to hear she was dead—it cut me. It cut me deeper when I come to tumble over the things she'd left behind in her box. Twenty years ago got nigher and nigher to yesterday, with every fresh thing belonging to her that I laid a hand on. There was a arbour in father's garden she used to be fond of working in of evenings. I'd lost all thought of that place for more years than I can reckon. I called it to mind again—and called her to mind, too, working and singing in the arbour—only with laying holt of a bit of patchwork stuff in the bottom of her box, with her needle and thread sticking in it."

"Ah, dear, dear!" sighed Mrs. Peckover, "I wish I'd seen her then! She was as happy, I dare say, as the bird on the tree. But there's one thing I can't exactly make out yet," she added—"how did you first come to know all about Mary's child?"

"All? There wasn't no all in it till I see the child herself. Except knowing that the poor creeter's baby had been born alive, I knowed nothing when I first come away from the old place in the countr̄y. 'Child! I hadn't nothing of the sort in my mind, when I got back to London. It was how to track the man as was Mary's death, that I puzzled about at that time—"

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Peckover, interposing to keep him from the dangerous subject, as she heard his voice change, and saw his eyes brighten. "Yes, but how did you see the child?"

"Zack took me into the Painter-man's big room—"

"Zack! Why, good Heavens! do you mean Zachary Thorpe?"

"I see a young woman standing among a lot of people all staring at her," continued Mat, without noticing the interruption. "I see her as close to, and as plain, as I see you. I see her look up, all of a sudden, front face to front face with me. A creeping and a crawling went through me; and I says to myself, 'Mary's child lived to grow up, and that's her.'"

"But, tell me, how you come to know Master Zack?"

"I says to myself, 'That's her,'" repeated Mat, his rough voice sinking lower and lower, his attention wandering farther and farther away from Mrs. Peckover. "Twenty year ago had got to be like yesterday, when I was down at the old place; and things I hadn't called to mind for long times past, I called to mind when I come to the churchyard-gate, and see father's

house. But there was looks Mary had with her eyes, turns Mary had with her head, twitches Mary had with her eyebrows when she looked up at you, that I'd forgot. They all come back to me as soon as I see that young woman's face."

"And do you really never mean to let your sister's child know who you are? You may tell me that, surely—though you won't speak a word about Master Zack."

"Let her know who I am? Mayhap I'll let her know before long. When I'm going back to the wild country, I may say to her: 'Rough as I am to look at, I'm your mother's brother, and you're the only flesh and blood I've got left in the world. Give us a shake of your hand, and a kiss for mother's sake; and I won't trouble you no more.' I may say that, afore I go back, and lose sight of her for good and all."

"Oh, but you won't go back. Tell Mr. Blyth you don't want to take her away, and then say, 'I'm Mr. Grice, and—'"

"Stop! Don't you get a-talking about Mr. Grice."

"Why not? It's your lawful name, isn't it?"

"Lawful enough, I dare say. But I don't like the sound of it, though it is mine. Father as good as said he was ashamed to own it, when he wrote me that letter: and I was afraid to own it, when I deserted from my ship. I ended with it years ago, and I won't take up with it again now. Call me 'Mat.' Take it as easy with me as if I was kin to you."

"Well, then—Mat," said Mrs. Peckover with a smile. "I've got such a many things to ask you still—"

"Ask them to-morrow," rejoined Matthew. "I've overdone myself with more talking than I'm used to. I want to be quiet with my tongue, and get to work with my hands for the rest of the day. You don't happen to have a foot-rule, do you?"

On being asked what motive could induce him to make this demand, Mat answered that he was anxious to proceed at once to the renewal of the cross-board at the head of his sister's grave. He wanted the rule to measure the dimensions of the board: he desired to be directed to a timber-merchant's, where he could buy wood; and, after that, he would worry Mrs. Peckover about nothing more. Extraordinary as his caprice appeared, the good woman saw that it had taken possession of him, and set herself to humour it. She procured the rule, and the address of a timber-merchant; and then they parted, Mat promising to call again in the evening.

When he presented himself at the timber-merchant's, after having carefully measured the old board in the churchyard, he came in no humour to be easily satisfied. Never was lady more difficult to decide about a new dress, than Mat, was when he arrived at the timber-merchant's, about the grain, thickness, and kind of wood to be chosen for the cross-board at the head of Mary's grave. At last, he selected a piece of walnut-wood; and, having paid the price demanded, enquired next for a carpenter, of whom he might hire tools. A man who has money to spare has all things at his command. Before evening, Mat had a set of tools, a shed to use them in, and a comfortable living-room, all at his own disposal.

Being skilful enough at all carpenter's work, he would, under most circumstances, have completed in a day or two such employment as he had now undertaken. But a strange fastidiousness delayed him through every stage. Mrs. Peckover, who came every morning to see how he was getting on, was amazed at the slowness of his progress. He was, from the first, morbidly scrupulous in keeping the board smooth and clean. After he had shaped it, and fitted it to its upright supports; after he had cut in it (by Mrs. Peckover's advice) the same inscription which had been placed on the old board—the simple initials "M. G.," with the year of Mary's death—after he had done these things, he was seized with a fancy for decorating the board at the sides. He carved an anchor at one side, and a tomahawk at the other—these being objects with which he was most familiar, and therefore the objects which he chose to represent. But even when the carving of his ornaments had been completed, he could not be prevailed on to set the new cross-board up in its place. Fondly as artists linger over their last loving touches to the picture, did Mat now linger, day after day, over the poor monument to his sister's memory, which his own rough hands had made. He smoothed it with sand-paper, he rubbed it industriously with leather, he polished it with oil, until, at last, Mrs. Peckover lost patience; and, trusting in the influence she had gained over him, insisted on his bringing his work to a close. Even while obeying her, he was still true to his resolution. He had said that no man's hand should help in the labour he had undertaken; and he was as good as his word, for he carried the cross-board himself to the churchyard.

All this time, he never once looked at that lock of hair which

he had been accustomed to take so frequently from his pocket but a few days back. Perhaps there was nothing in common between the thought of tracing Arthur Carr, and the thoughts of Mary that came to him while he was at work.

But when the cross-board had been set up; when he had cleared away the mud and brambles about the mound, and had made a smooth little path round it; when he had looked at his work from all points of view, and had satisfied himself that he could do nothing more to perfect it, the restless, and violent elements in his nature seemed to awake on a sudden. His fingers began to search again in his pocket for the lock of hair; and when he and Mrs. Peckover next met, the first words he addressed to her announced his departure for Dibbledean.

She had strengthened her hold on his gratitude by getting him permission, through the Rector, to occupy himself, without molestation, in the work of repairing his sister's grave. She had persuaded him to confide to her many particulars concerning himself which he had refused to communicate at first. But when she tried, at parting, to fathom what his ultimate intentions were now that he was leaving Bangbury with the avowed purpose of discovering Arthur Carr, she failed to extract from him a single explanation, or even a word of reply. When he took his farewell, he charged her not to communicate their meeting to Mr. Blyth, till she heard from him again; and he tried once more to thank her in as fit words as he could command, for the kindness she had shown towards Mary Grice; but, to the very last, he closed his lips resolutely on the subject of Arthur Carr.

He had been a fortnight absent when he set forth for Dibbledean, to try that last chance of tracing the hidden man, which might be afforded by search among the papers of Joanna Grice.

The astonishment of Mr. Tatt when Matthew, appearing in the character of a client at the office door, actually announced himself as the sole surviving son of Joshua Grice, flowed out in such a torrent of words, that Mat was at first overwhelmed. He soon recovered, however; and while Mr. Tatt was still haranguing about proving his client's identity, and securing his client's right of inheritance, silenced the solicitor, by declaring bluntly, that he had not come to Dibbledean to be helped to get money, guardian of the late Miss Grice's papers, permission to look over the different documents the old woman might have left behind her.

It was to no purpose that Mr. Tatt represented this course of proceeding as unprofessional. While he was still expostulating, Matthew was stepping out at the door; and Mr. Tatt, who could not afford to lose even this most unmanageable of clients, had no other alternative but to make the best of it, and run out after him.

Mr. Nawby was a remarkably lofty, and ceremonious gentleman, feeling as bitter a scorn for Mr. Tatt as it is possible for one legal human being to entertain towards another. He would have received the irregular visit of which he was now the object with chilling contempt, if he had been allowed time to assert his dignity. But before he could utter a word, Matthew, in defiance of all that Mr. Tatt could say to silence him, announced himself in his proper character; and then, after premising that he came to worry nobody about money matters, added that he wanted to look over the late Joanna Grice's papers, for a purpose which was not of the smallest consequence to anyone but himself.

Under ordinary circumstances, Mr. Nawby would have simply declined to hold any communication with Mat, until his identity had been proved. But the prosperous solicitor had a grudge against the audacious adventurer who had set up in practice against him; and he resolved to depart a little from the strictly professional course, for the express purpose of depriving Mr. Tatt of as many prospective six-and-eight-pences as possible. Waving his hand solemnly, when Mat had done speaking, he rang a bell and ordered in his head clerk.

"Mr. Scutt," said Mr. Nawby, loftily addressing the clerk, "have the goodness to witness in the first place, that I protest against this visit on Mr. Tatt's part. In the second place, that I do not admit the identity of this party" (pointing to Mat), "and that what I am now about to say, I say under protest, and denying pro formâ that he is the party he represents himself to be. You understand?"

Mr. Scutt bowed reverently. Mr. Nawby went on.

"If your business connection, sir, with that party," he said, addressing Matthew, and indicating Mr. Tatt, "was only entered into to forward the purpose you have mentioned, I beg to inform you (denying, you will understand, your right to ask for such information) that you may wind up matters with your solicitor whenever you please. The late Miss Grice left neither letters nor papers. I destroyed them all, by her wish, in her

presence, and under her written authority, during her last illness. My clerk here, who was present, will corroborate the statement, if you wish it."

Mat listened to these words, but to nothing more. A sturdy legal altercation immediately ensued between the two solicitors—but it hardly reached his ears. Mr. Tatt took his arm, and led him out, talking more fluently than ever; but he had not the poorest trifle of attention to bestow on Mr. Tatt. All his faculties seemed absorbed by one momentous consideration: Had he lost the last chance of tracing Arthur Carr?

When they got into the High Street, his mind somewhat recovered its freedom of action, and he began to feel the necessity of deciding on his movements. Now that his final resource had failed, what should he do? It was useless to go back to Bang-bury, useless to remain at Dibbledean. Yet the fit was on him to be moving—better to return to Kirk Street than remain inactive on the scene of his defeat.—

He stopped suddenly; and saying: "It's no good waiting now; I shall go back to London"; impatiently shook himself free of Mr. Tatt's arm. He found it by no means so easy, however, to shake himself free of Mr. Tatt. "Depend on my zeal," cried this energetic solicitor, following Matthew pertinaciously to the station. "If there's law in England, your identity shall be proved and your rights respected. I intend to throw myself into this case, heart and soul. One moment, my dear sir! If you must go back to London, oblige me with your address, and just state whether you were christened at Dibbledean church. I want nothing more to begin with.

Willing to do anything to get rid of his solicitor, Mat mentioned his address, and the name by which he was known, impatiently said "Yes," to the inquiry as to whether he had been christened at Dibbledean church—and then abruptly turning away, left Mr. Tatt standing in the road, making notes.

As soon as Mat was alone, the ominous question suggested itself again: Had he lost the last chance of tracing Arthur Carr? Although facts seemed to prove that he had—he held to his old superstition. Once more he pulled out the lock of hair, and pondered over it. Once more, while he journeyed to London, that strange conviction upheld him, which had already supported him under previous checks. "I shall find him," thought Mat, whirling along in the train. "I don't care where he's hid, I shall find him yet!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE DISCOVERY OF ARTHUR CARR.

True to his promise to Valentine, Zack, on the morning of his friend's departure for the country, presented himself at Mr. Strather's, with his letter of introduction, punctually at eleven and was started by that gentleman, before noon, as a student in the statue-halls of the British Museum. He worked away till the rooms were closed; and then returned to Kirk Street, not by any means enthusiastically devoted to his new occupation; but determined to persevere, because he was determined to keep to his word.

His new profession wore, however, a much more encouraging aspect when Mr. Strather introduced him, in the evening, to the private Academy. Here, live people were the models to study from. Here he was free to mix up the pinkest possible flesh tints with bran-new brushes. Here were high-spirited students, easy in manners and picturesque in appearance, with whom he contrived to become intimate directly. And here, to crown all, was a Model, sitting for the chest and arms, who had been a prize-fighter, and with whom Zack joyfully cemented the bonds of an eternal (pugilistic) friendship, on the first night of his admission to Mr. Strather's Academy.

All through the second day he laboured at his drawing with immense resolution and infinitesimal progress. All through the evening he daubed industriously under Mr. Strather's supervision, until the sitting was suspended. It would have been well if he had gone home as soon as he laid down his brushes. But in an evil hour he lingered after the studies were over, to gossip with the prize-fighting Model; and in an indiscreet moment he consented to officiate as one of the patrons at an exhibition of sparring, to be held that night in a neighbouring tavern, for the ex-pugilist's benefit.

After being conducted in an orderly manner for some little time, the pugilistic proceedings of the evening were interrupted by one of the Patrons (who was also a student at the Academy), declaring that his pocket had been picked, and insisting that the door should be closed and the police summoned. Great confusion ensued, amid which Zack supported the demand of his fellow-student—perhaps a little warmly. At any rate, a gentleman sitting opposite, with a patch over one eye, and a nose broken in three places, swore that young Thorpe had insulted

him by implying that he was the thief; and vindicated his character by throwing a plate at Zack's head. The missile struck the mark, and breaking when it struck, inflicted what appeared to every unprofessional eye a very extensive and dangerous wound.

The chemist to whom Zack was taken to be bandaged thought little of the hurt; but the local doctor who was called in, after the lad's removal to Kirk Street, did not take so reassuring a view. The wound was certainly not situated in a dangerous part of the head; but it had been inflicted at a time when Zack's constitution was in a very unhealthy condition, from the effects of much more ardent spirit-drinking than was good for him. Bad symptoms set in, and appearances became visible in the neighbourhood of the wound, at which the medical head shook ominously. In short, Zack was now confined to his bed, with the worst illness he had ever had, and with no friend to look after him except the landlady.

Wretchedly weak and reduced—unwilling to alarm his mother by informing her of his illness—without Valentine to console him, or Mat to amuse him, Zack's spirits sank to a far lower ebb than they had ever fallen to before. In his present state of depression, there were moments when he doubted of his own recovery, in spite of all that the doctor could tell him. While in this frame of mind, the remembrance of the last report he had heard of his father's health, affected him painfully, and he bitterly condemned himself for never having written to ask Mr. Thorpe's pardon since he left home. He was too weak to use the pen himself; but the tobacconist's wife was always ready to serve him; and he determined to make his mind easier by asking her to write a few penitent lines for him, and by having the letter despatched immediately to Baregrove Square. His landlady had long since been made the confidant of his domestic tribulations (for he communicated them to everybody with whom he was brought in contact); and she showed, therefore, no surprise when his request was preferred to her. This was the letter which Zack, with tearful eyes and faltering voice, dictated to the tobacconist's wife:—

"My dear Father,—I am truly sorry for never having written to ask you to forgive me. I write now, and beg your pardon with all my heart, for I am indeed ashamed of myself. If you will only let me have another trial, and will not be too hard

upon me, I will do my best never to give you more trouble. Pray write to me at 14, Kirk Street, Wendover Market, where I am now living with a friend who has been very kind. Please give my dear love to mother, and believe me your truly penitent son,

Z. THORPE, jun."

Having got through this letter pretty easily, and finding that the tobacconist's wife was quite ready to write another for him, Zack resolved to send a line to Mr. Blyth, who, as well as he could calculate, might now be expected from the country every day. On the evening when he had been brought home with the wound in his head, he had entreated that his accident might be kept a secret from Mrs. Blyth (who knew his address), in case she should send after him. This word of caution was not uselessly spoken. Only three days later a note was brought from Mrs. Blyth, upbraiding him for never having been near the house during Valentine's absence, and asking him to come that evening. The messenger, who waited for an answer, was sent back with the most artful verbal excuse which the landlady could provide, and no more notes had been delivered since. Mrs. Blyth was doubtless not over-well satisfied with the manner in which her invitation had been received.

In his present condition, Zack's conscience upbraided him soundly for having thought of deceiving Valentine by keeping him in ignorance of what had happened. Now that Mat seemed, by his long absence, to have deserted Kirk Street for ever, there was a double attraction and hope for the heart-sick Zack in the prospect of seeing the painter's genial face. To this kindest and most merciful of friends, therefore, he determined to confess, what he dare not so much as hint to his father.

The note which, by the assistance of the tobacconist's wife, he addressed to Valentine, was as characteristically boyish, as the note he had sent to his father. It ran thus:

"My Dear Blyth,—I begin to wish I had never been born; for I have got into another scrape—having been knocked on the head by a prize-fighter with a plate. It was wrong to go where I did, I know. But I went to Mr. Strather and stuck to my drawing—I did indeed! Pray come, as soon as you get back—I send this letter to make sure of getting you at once. I am so lonely, and too weak to get out of bed.

"My landlady is very kind; but, as for that vagabond, Mat, he has been away, I don't know how long, and has never

written. Please do come! and don't blow me up much, for I am so weak I can hardly keep from crying, when I think of what has happened. Ever yours,

Z. THORPE, junr.

"P.S. If you have got any of my money left, I should be glad if you would bring it. I haven't a farthing.

Mr. Thorpe sat alone in his dining-parlour—the same dining-parlour in which, so many years ago, he had argued with old Mr. Goodworth, about his son's education. Mrs. Thorpe, being confined to her room by a cold, was unable to keep him company—the doctor had just taken leave of him—friends in general were forbidden, on medical authority, to excite him by visits—he was left lonely, and he had the prospect of remaining lonely for the rest of the day. That total prostration of the nervous system, from which the doctor had declared him to be now suffering, showed itself painfully, from time to time, in his actions as well as his looks—in his sudden startings when an unexpected noise occurred in the house, in the trembling of his wan yellowish-white hand whenever he lifted it from the table, in the transparent paleness of his cheeks, in the anxious uncertainty of his ever-wandering eyes.

His attention was directed on an open letter—a letter fitted to encourage and console, if earthly hopes could speak of happiness to his heart, or earthly solace administer repose.

But a few days back, his wife's entreaties and the doctor's advice had at length prevailed on him to increase his chances of recovery, by resigning the post of secretary to one of the Societies to which he belonged. The letter he was now looking at, had been written to inform him that the members of the Society accepted his resignation with regret; and to prepare him for a visit on the morrow from a deputation charged to present him with an address and testimonial—both of which had been unanimously voted by the Society "in grateful and affectionate recognition of his high character and eminent services, while acting as their secretary." He had not been able to resist the temptation of showing this letter to the doctor; and he could not refrain from reading it once again now, before he put it back in his desk. It was, in his eyes, the great reward of his life.

He was still lingering over the last sentence, when Zack's letter was brought in. It was only for a moment that he had dared to taste the sweetness of a well-won triumph—even in that moment, there mingled with it the poisoning bitter of every past

association that could pain him most! With a sigh, he put away the letter from friends who honoured him, to answer the letter from the son who had deserted him.

There was grief, but no anger in his face, as he read it for the second time. He sat thinking a little while—then drew towards him his inkstand—hesitated—wrote a few lines—and paused again, putting down the pen this time, and covering his eyes. After sitting thus for some minutes, he seemed to despair of being able to collect his thoughts, and to resolve on giving his mind time to compose itself. He shut up his son's letter and his own unfinished reply in the paper-case. But there was promise for Zack's future prospects contained even in the little he had already written; and the letter suggested forgiveness at the outset; for it began, "My dear Zachary."

On delivering Zack's second note at Valentine's house, the messenger was informed that Mr. Blyth was expected back on the next day. Having a discretionary power to deal as she pleased with her husband's correspondence, when he was away from home, Mrs. Blyth opened the letter as soon as it was taken to her. Madonna was in the room at the time, just ready to go out for her usual daily walk.

"Oh, that wretched Zack!" exclaimed Mrs. Blyth, looking seriously distressed, the moment her eyes fell on the first lines. "He must be ill, indeed," she added, looking at the handwriting; "for he has not written himself."

Madonna could not hear these words, but could see the expression which accompanied their utterance, and could indicate by a sign her anxiety to know what had happened. Mrs. Blyth beckoned to the girl to look over her shoulder, as the shortest way of explaining what was the matter.

"How distressed Valentine will be to hear of this!" thought Mrs. Blyth. The housemaid was charged by her mistress to go to Kirk Street at once; and after inquiring of the landlady about Zack's health, to get a list of any comforts he might want, and bring it back as soon as possible. "And leave a message," pursued Mrs. Blyth, "to say that he need not trouble himself about money, for your master will come back from the country to-morrow."

Here, her attention was arrested by Madonna, who was impatiently signing on her fingers: "What are you saying to Patty? Do let me know what you are saying to Patty?"

Mrs. Blyth repeated, by means of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, the instructions she had given to the servant; and added—observing the paleness of Madonna's face—"Let us not frighten ourselves, my dear, about Zack; he may turn out to be better than we think him from reading his letter."

"May I go with Patty?" rejoined Madonna, her fingers trembling as they rapidly formed these words. "Let me take my walk with Patty, just as if nothing had happened. Pray, let me go!"

"She can't be of any use, poor child," thought Mrs. Blyth; "but if I keep her here, she will only be fretting herself into one of her headaches. Besides, she may as well have her walk, for I shan't be able to spare Patty later. Influenced by these considerations, Mrs. Blyth, by a nod, intimated to her adopted child that she might accompany the housemaid. Madonna, the moment permission was granted, led the way out of the room; but stopped as soon as she and Patty were alone on the staircase, and, making a sign that she would be back directly, ran up to her own bed-chamber.

When she entered the room, she unlocked a little dressing-case that Valentine had given to her; and, emptying out of one of the trays four sovereigns and some silver, all her savings, wrapped them up, and ran down again to Patty. Zack was ill and miserable; longing for a friend to sit and comfort him—and she could not be that friend! But Zack was also poor; she had read it in his letter; there were many things he wanted; he needed money—and in that need she might secretly be a friend, for she had money.

"My four sovereigns shall be the first he has," thought Madonna, taking the housemaid's offered arm. "I will put them in some place where he is sure to find them, and never to know who they come from. And Zack shall be rich again—rich with all the money I have got to give." Four sovereigns represented a fortune in Madonna's eyes. It had taken her a long time to save them.

When they knocked at the private door of the tobacco-shop, it was opened by the landlady, who, after hearing what their errand was, and answering some preliminary inquiries after Zack, invited them to walk into her back parlour. But Madonna seemed—quite incomprehensibly to the servant—to be bent on remaining in the passage till she had finished writing some lines

which she had just then begun on her slate. When they were completed, she showed them to Patty, who read them with astonishment: "Ask where his sitting-room is, and if I can go into it. I want to leave something for him."

After looking at her young mistress's eager face for a moment or two Patty asked the required questions; prefacing them with some words of explanation which drew from the tobacconist's wife many expressions of sympathy for Madonna. At last, there came to an end; and the desired answers to the questions on the slate were readily given, and duly, though rather slowly, written down by Patty. The sitting-room belonging to Mr. Thorpe and the other gentleman, was on the first floor. Nobody was in it now. Would the lady like to be shown—

Here, Madonna nodded to indicate that she understood what had been written—and then, with her money in her hand, ran up the first flight of stairs; ascending them so quickly that she was on the landing before Patty and the landlady had settled which of the two ought to have preceded her.

The front room was indeed empty when she entered it, but one of the folding doors leading into the back room had been left ajar; and when she looked towards the opening thus made, she also looked, from the particular point of view she then occupied, towards the head of the bed on which Zack lay, and saw his face turned towards her, hushed in sleep.

She started violently—trembled a little—then stood motionless, looking towards him; tears standing in her eyes, the colour gone from her cheeks, the yearning pulses of grief and pity beating faster and faster in her heart. Ah! how wan and piteously still he lay, with the ghastly white bandages round his head, and one languid hand hanging over the bedside! How changed from that glorious creature, all youth, health, strength, and exulting activity, whom it had so long been her innocent idolatry to worship in secret! How fearfully like what might be the image of him in death, was the present image of him as he lay in his hushed sleep! She shuddered as the thought crossed her mind, and drying the tears that obscured her sight, looked round the room. Her quick eyes detected at a glance all its squalid disorder, all its defects of comfort, all its repulsive unfitness for the sick. Surely a little money might help Zack to a better place to recover in! Surely her money might minister in this way to his comfort, and restoration to health!

Full of this idea, she advanced a step or two, and sought a proper place in which she might put her packet of money.

While she was thus engaged, an old newspaper, with some hair in it, caught her eye. The hair was Zack's; having been cut off that morning by the doctor, who thought that enough had not been removed from the neighbourhood of the wound by the barber employed to clear the hair from the injured side of the head. Madonna had hardly looked at the newspaper before she recognised the hair in it as Zack's by its colour, and the faint golden tinge running through it. One little curly lock, lying rather apart from the rest, allured her eyes; she longed to take it as a keepsake—a keepsake which Zack would never know she possessed! For a moment she hesitated, and the longing became irresistible. After glancing over her shoulder to assure herself that no one had followed her, she took the lock of hair, and hid it in her bosom.

Her eyes had assured her that there was no one in the room; but, if she had not been deprived of hearing, she would have known that persons were approaching, by the sound of voices on the stairs—a man's voice among them. Ignorant, however, of this, she advanced unconcernedly, after taking the lock of hair, from the table to the chimney-piece, which it struck her might be the safest place to leave the money on. She had just put it down there, when she felt the slight concussion caused by the opening and closing of the door; and turning instantly, confronted Patty, the landlady, and the swarthy-faced friend of Zack's, who had made her a present of the pouch.

Terror and confusion overpowered her, as she saw him advance to the chimney-piece and take up the packet. He had evidently opened the room-door in time to see her put it down; and he was now unfolding the paper and examining the money.

While he was thus occupied, Patty came up to her, and, confused and agitated, began writing on her slate, much faster than usual. She gathered, however, from the few crooked lines scrawled, that Patty had been startled by the sudden entrance of the landlady's rough lodger, who had let himself in, just as she was about to follow her young mistress up to the sitting-room, and had uncivilly stood in her way on the stairs, while he listened to what the good woman of the house had to tell him about young Thorpe's illness. Confused as the writing was, Madonna contrived to interpret it thus far, and would have gone on in-

terpreting more, if she had not felt a hand laid on her arm, and had not, on looking round, seen Zack's friend making signs to her, with her money in his hand.

She felt confused, but not frightened now; for his eyes expressed neither suspicion nor anger. They rested on her face kindly, while he pointed to the money in his hand, and then to her. She felt that her colour was rising, and that it was a hard matter to acknowledge the gold and silver as being her own property; but she did so. He then pointed to himself; and when she shook her head, pointed through the folding doors into Zack's room. Her cheeks began to burn, and she grew suddenly afraid to look to him; but it was no harder trial to confess the truth than to deny it by making a false sign. So she looked up at him again, and nodded her head.

His eyes seemed to grow softer as they rested kindly on her; but he made her take back the money, and, holding her hand as he did so, detained it for a moment with awkward gentleness. Then, after pointing again to Zack's room, he began to search in the breast-pocket of his coat, took from it at one rough grasp some letters tied together loosely, and a clumsy-looking rolled-up strip of fur, put the letters aside on the table behind him, and, unrolling the fur, showed her that there were bank-notes in it. She understood him directly—he had money for Zack, and wanted none from her.

After he had replaced the strip of fur in his pocket, he took up the letters from the table to be put back also. As he reached them towards him, a lock of hair, which seemed to have got between them, fell on the floor at her feet. She stooped to pick it up; and was surprised, as she did so, to see that it exactly resembled in colour the lock of Zack's hair which she had taken and hidden in her bosom.

She was surprised at this; and more than surprised, when he angrily and abruptly snatched up the lock of hair, just as she touched it. Did he think that she wanted to take it from him? If he did, it was easy to show him that a lock of Zack's hair was no such rarity that people need quarrel about it. She reached her hand to the table behind, and, taking some of the hair from the old newspaper, held it up with a smile, as he was putting his own lock of hair back in his pocket.

For a moment he did not seem to comprehend what her action meant; then the resemblance between the hair in her hand and the hair in his own, struck him suddenly,

The expression of his face changed in an instant—changed so darkly that she recoiled in terror, and put back the hair into the newspaper. He pounced on it directly; and, crunching it up in his hand, turned fiercely-questioning eyes on the landlady. While she was answering his inquiry, Madonna saw him look towards Zack; and, as he looked, another change passed over his face—the darkness faded, and the red scars on his cheek deepened in colour. He moved slowly to the further corner of the room from the folding-doors; his eyes fixed in a vacant stare, one hand clutched the old newspaper, the other motioning impatiently to the astonished women to leave him.

Madonna had felt Patty pulling at her arm more than once during the last minute or two. She was now as anxious as her companion to quit the house. They went out quickly, not venturing to look at Mat again; and the landlady followed. She and Patty had a long talk at the street door—evidently, judging by the expression of their faces, about the conduct of the lodger up-stairs. But Madonna felt no desire to be informed of what they were saying. Much as Matthew's strange behaviour had startled her, he was not uppermost in her mind. It was the discovery of her secret, the failure of her plan for helping Zack with her money, that she was now thinking of with confusion and dismay. She had not been in the front room at Kirk Street much more than five minutes—yet what a succession of events had passed in that short space of time!

For a long while Mat stood motionless in the furthest corner of the room from the folding-doors, looking vacantly towards Zack's bedchamber. His first surprise on finding a stranger talking in the passage, when he let himself in; his first vexation on hearing of Zack's accident; his momentary impulse to discover himself to Mary's child, when he saw Madonna standing in his room, and again when he knew that she had come there with her little offering, for the one purpose of helping the sick lad—all these sensations were now gone from his memory as well as from his heart; absorbed in the one predominant emotion with which the discovery of the resemblance between Zack's hair and the hair from Jane Holdworth's letter now filled him. No ordinary shocks could strike Mat's mind hard enough to make it lose its balance—this shock prostrated it in an instant.

As he gradually recovered his self-possession, so did the desire strengthen in him to ascertain the resemblance between the two

kinds of hair once more—but in such a manner as it had not been ascertained yet. He stole to the folding-doors and looked into young Thorpe's room. Zack was still asleep.

The similarity between the sleeper's hair and the hair of Arthur Carr was perfect! Both were of the same light brown, and both had running through that colour the same delicate golden tinge.

Why had this resemblance never struck him before? Perhaps because he had never examined Arthur Carr's hair with attention until he had possessed himself of Mary's bracelet, and had gone away to the country. Perhaps because he had never taken notice enough of Zack's hair to look close at it. And now the resemblance was traced, to what conclusion did it point? Plainly, from Zack's youth, to none in connection with him. But what elder relatives had he?

Did he take after his father?

Mat was looking down at the sleeper, just then; something in the lad's face troubled him, and kept his mind from pursuing that last thought. There was anxiety and dread in his face, as he thought of the question in relation to the discovery he had just made, which must be addressed to Zack when he awoke. He had never known how fond he was of his fellow lodger until now, when he was conscious of dismay at the prospect of addressing that question to the friend who had lived as a brother with him, since the day when they first met.

As the evening closed in, Zack woke. It was a relief to Mat, as he went to the bedside, to know that his face could not now be clearly seen. That terrible question pressed heavily on his heart, while he held his comrade's feeble hand; while he answered as considerately, yet as briefly as he could, the inquiries addressed to him; and while he listened patiently to the sufferer's long, wandering, faintly-uttered narrative of the accident. Towards the close, Zack himself unconsciously led the way to the question which Mat longed, yet dreaded to ask him.

"Well, old fellow," he said, turning feebly on his pillow, so as to face Matthew, "something like what you call the 'horrors' has been taking hold of me. And this morning, in particular, I was so wretched and lonely, that I asked the landlady to write for me to my father, begging his pardon. I haven't behaved as well as I ought; and, somehow, when a fellow's ill, he gets home-sick—"

His voice began to grow faint, and he left the sentence unfinished.

"Zack," said Mat, turning his face away while he spoke, though it was dark. "Zack," what sort of a man is your father?"

"What sort of a man! How do you mean?"

"To look at. Are you like him in the face?"

"Lord help you, Mat! as little like as possible. My father's face is all wrinkled and marked."

"Aye, aye, like other old men's faces. His hair's grey, I suppose?"

"Quite white. By-the-way there is one point I'm like him in—at least, like what he was, when he was young."

"What's that?"

"What we've been speaking of—his hair. I've heard mother say, when she married him—shake up my pillow, will you?"

"Yes, yes. And what did you hear your mother say?"

"Only that when he was young his hair was exactly like what mine is now."

As those momentous words were spoken, the landlady knocked at the door, and announced that she was waiting outside with candles, and a cup of tea for the invalid. Mat let her into the bedchamber—then walked out of it into the front room, and closed the folding-doors behind him. Brave as he was, he was afraid, at that moment, to let Zack see his face.

He walked to the fireplace, and rested his head and arm on the chimney-piece—reflected for a while—then stood upright again—and searching in his pocket, drew from it once more that lock of hair, which he had examined so often.

"Your's work's done," he said, looking at it in his hand—then throwing it into the dull red fire, burning low in the grate. "Your work's done; and mine won't be long a-doing." He rested his head and arm wearily on the chimney-piece, and added:—

"I'm brothers with Zack—there's the hard part of it!—I'm brothers with Zack."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

On the forenoon of the day that followed Mat's return to Kirk Street, Bargrove Square was enlivened by a procession of

three private carriages which stopped at Mr. Thorpe's door.

From each there descended gentlemen of highly respectable appearance, clothed in shining black garments, and wearing white cravats. One carried in his hands a handsome silver inkstand, and another who followed him, bore a roll of glossy paper, tied round with a broad ribbon of sober purple hue. The roll contained an Address to Mr. Thorpe, eulogising his character; the inkstand was a Testimonial to be presented after the Address; and the gentlemen who occupied the three private carriages were all eminent members of the religious society which Mr. Thorpe had served in the capacity of Secretary, and from which he was now obliged to secede in consequence of his health.

A small and orderly assembly of idle people had collected on the pavement to see the gentlemen alight, to watch them go into the house, to stare at the inkstand, to wonder at the Address, to observe that Mr. Thorpe's page wore his best livery, and that Mr. Thorpe's housemaid had on new cap-ribbons and her Sunday gown. After the street door had been closed, and these various objects for popular admiration had disappeared, there still remained an attraction outside in the square, which addressed itself to the general ear. One of the footmen in attendance on the carriages, had collected many interesting particulars about the Deputation and the Testimonial, and while he related them in regular order to another footman anxious for information, the small public of idlers stood round about, and eagerly caught up any stray words explanatory of the ceremonies then in progress inside the house.

One of the most attentive of these listeners was a swarthy-complexioned man with a scarred face, who had made one of the assembly on the pavement from its first congregating. He had been almost as much stared at by the people about him as the Deputation; and had been set down among them generally as a foreigner: but, in plain truth, he was English to the back-bone, being no other than Matthew Grice.

Mat's look was just as quietly vigilant, his manner just as gruffly self-possessed, as usual. But it had cost him a hard struggle that morning, in the solitude of one of his longest and loneliest walks, to compose himself—or, in his favourite phrase, to "get to be his own man again."

From the moment he had thrown the lock of hair into the

fire, to the moment when he was now loitering at Mr. Thorpe's door, he had never doubted that the man who had been the ruin of his sister, and the man who was the nearest blood relation of the comrade who shared his roof, and lay sick at that moment in his bed, were one and the same. Though he stood now, amid the casual street spectators, apparently as indolently curious as the most careless—looking at what they looked at, listening to what they listened to, and leaving the square when they left it—he was resolved all the time to watch his first opportunity of entering Mr. Thorpe's house that very day; resolved to investigate through all its ramifications the secret he had first discovered when the fragments of Zack's hair were playfully held up for him to look at in the deaf and dumb girl's hand.

Regardless of the rain, Mat walked slowly up and down the streets round Baregrove Square, peering every now and then, from afar off, through the misty shower, to see if the carriages were still drawn up at Mr. Thorpe's door. The ceremony of presenting the Testimonial was evidently a protracted one; for the vehicles were long kept waiting. The rain passed away—the sun reappeared—fresh clouds gathered, and it was threatening a second shower, before the Deputation re-entered their vehicles and drove out of the square.

When they had quitted it, Mat advanced and knocked at Mr. Thorpe's door. The first warning drops of the new shower began to fall as the door opened.

The servant hesitated about admitting him. He had anticipated this obstacle, and had provided against it beforehand. "Tell your master," he said, "that his son is ill, and I've come to speak to him about it."

This message had the desired effect. Mat was admitted immediately.

The chairs occupied by the Deputation had not been moved—the silver inkstand was on the table—the Address lay by it. Mr. Thorpe stood before the fire-place, and bending over the table, examined, for the second time, the signatures, while his visitor was being ushered up stairs.

Mat's arrival had interrupted him at the moment when he was going to Mrs. Thorpe's room, to describe to her the Presentation ceremony which she had not been well enough to attend. He had stopped, and the faint smile on his face had vanished, when the news of his son's illness reached him through the ser-

vant. But the hectic flush of pleasure which his interview with the Deputation had called into his cheeks, still coloured them when Matthew Grice entered the room.

"You have come, sir," Mr. Thorpe began, "to tell me—"

He hesitated, stammered another word or two, then stopped. Something in the expression of the dark face, lowering at him under the black velvet skull-cap, suspended the words on his lips. In his present nervous, enfeebled state, any sudden emotions, no matter how slight and temporary, always proved too powerful for his self-control, and betrayed themselves in his speech and manner.

Mat said not a word to break the silence. Was he at that moment standing face to face with Arthur Carr? Could this man—with the narrow chest, the drooping figure, the effeminate pink tinge on his wan cheeks—be indeed the man who had driven Mary to that last refuge, where the brambles and weeds grew thick in the forgotten corner of the churchyard?

"You have come, sir," resumed Mr. Thorpe, controlling himself by an effort, "to tell me news of my son, which I am not unprepared for. I heard from him yesterday. My nerves are not very strong, and have been tried—pleasurably, most pleasurably tried—already this morning, by such testimonies of sympathy as it does not fall to the lot of many men to earn. May I beg you, if your news should be of an alarming nature (which God forbid!) to communicate it as gently—"

"My news is this," Mat broke in: "Your son's been hurt in the head, but he's got over the worst now. He lives with me; I like him; and I mean to take care of him till he gets on his legs again. That's my news about your son. But that's not all. I bring news of somebody else."

"Will you take a seat, and be good enough to explain?"

They sat at opposite sides of the table, the Testimonial and the Address lying between them. The shower outside was beginning to fall at its heaviest. The splashing noise of the rain and the sound of running footsteps, as foot passengers in the square made for shelter at the top of their speed, penetrated into the room during the silence which ensued after they had taken their seats. Mr. Thorpe spoke first.

"May I inquire your name?" he said, in his calmest tones.

Mat did not seem to hear. He took up the Address from the table, looked at the list of signatures, and turned to Mr. Thorpe.

"I've been hearing about this," he said, "Are all them names there, the names of friends of yours?"

Mr. Thorpe looked astonished; but he answered after a moment's hesitation:—

"Certainly; the most valued friends I have in the world."

"Friends," pursued Mat, reading the introductory sentence in the address, "who put the most affectionate trust in you."

Mr. Thorpe began to look rather offended as well as rather astonished. "Will you excuse me," he said coldly, "if I beg you to proceed to the business that has brought you here."

Mat placed the Address on the table again, in front of him; and took a pencil from a tray with writing materials, which stood near at hand. "Friends 'who put the most affectionate trust in you,'" he repeated. "The name of one friend isn't here. It ought to be; and I mean to put it down."

As the point of his pencil touched the paper of the Address, Mr. Thorpe started from his chair.

"What am I to understand, sir, by this conduct?" he began, stretching out his hand to possess himself of the Address.

Mat looked up with the serpent-glitter in his eyes, and the red tinge glowing in the scars on his cheek. "Sit down," he said, "I'm not quick at writing. Sit down till I'm done."

Mr. Thorpe's face began to look a little agitated. He took a step towards the fire-place, intending to ring the bell.

"Sit down, and wait," Mat reiterated, in quick, fierce, quietly uttered tones of command, rising from his chair, and pointing peremptorily to the seat vacated by the master of the house.

A doubt crossed Mr. Thorpe's mind, and made him pause before he touched the bell. Could this man be in his right senses? His actions were unaccountable—his words and his way of uttering them were strange—his scarred scowling face looked hardly human. Would it be well to summon help? Except the page, who was a boy, there were none but women servants in the house. When he remembered this, he sat down again, and Mat began, clumsily and slowly, to write on the blank space beneath the last signature to the Address.

The sky was still darkening apace, the rain was falling heavily, as he traced the final letter, and then handed the paper to Mr. Thorpe, bearing inscribed on it the name of Mary Grice.

"Read that name," said Mat.

Mr. Thorpe looked at the characters traced by the pencil.

His face changed instantly—he sank down into the chair—one faint cry burst from his lips—then he was silent.

Momentary as it was, that cry proclaimed him to be the man. He was self-denounced even before he cowered, shuddering, in the chair, with both hands pressed over his face.

Mat rose to his feet and spoke; eyeing him pitilessly.

"Not a friend of all of 'em," he said, pointing at the Address, "put such trust in you, as she did. When first I see her grave, I said I'd be even with the man who laid her in it. I'm here to-day to be even with you. Carr or Thorpe, whichever you call yourself, I know how you used her from first to last! Her father was my father; her name is my name: you were her worst enemy three-and-twenty years ago; you are my worst enemy now. I'm her brother, Matthew Grice!"

The hands of the shuddering figure beneath him suddenly dropped—the ghastly uncovered face looked up at him, with such a panic stare in the eyes, such a fearful quivering and distortion of all the features, that it tried even his firmness of nerve to look at it steadily. In spite of himself he went back to his chair, and sat down doggedly by the table, and was silent.

A low murmuring and moaning, amid which disconnected words made themselves distinguishable, caused him to look round. The ghastly face was once more hidden. He heard the disconnected words reiterated, always in the same wailing tones. Now and then, a half finished phrase was audible from behind the withered hands clasped over the face. He heard such fragments of sentences as these:—"Have pity on my wife"—"accept the remorse of many years"—"spare me the disgrace—"

After those four last words, Mat listened for no more. The merciless spirit was roused in him the moment he heard them.

"Spare you the disgrace?" he repeated, starting to his feet. "Did you spare her?—Not you!"

Once more the hands dropped; once more the ghastly face slowly and horribly confronted him. But this time he never recoiled. There was no mercy in his looks, none in his tones.

"It would disgrace you, would it? Then disgraced you shall be! You've kep' it a secret, have you? You shall tell that secret to every soul! You shall own Mary's disgrace, Mary's death, and Mary's child, before every man who's put his name down on that paper! You shall, if I have to bring your child with me to make you; if I have to stand up, hand in hand with her, here on your own hearthstone."

He stopped. The cowering figure was struggling upward from the chair, one of the withered hands stretching itself out towards him; the panic-stricken eyes were growing less vacant, and were staring straight into his with fearful meaning; the pale lips were muttering rapidly—at first he could not tell what; then he succeeded in catching the two words, "Mary's child?" faintly, incessantly reiterated, until he spoke again.

"Yes," he said, pitiless as ever. "Yes: Mary's child. Your child. Haven't you seen her? Is it that you're trembling about? Go and look at her: she lives within gunshot of you. Ask Zack's friend to show you the deaf and dumb girl he picked up among the horse-riders. Look here—look at this bracelet! Do you remember your own hair? The hands that brought up Mary's child, took that bracelet from Mary's pocket. Look at it again! Look at it as close as you like—"

Once more he stopped. The frail figure which had been feebly rising, while he held up the Hair Bracelet, suddenly sank back—he saw the eyelids half close, and a great stillness pass over the face—he heard one deep-drawn breath; but no cry now, no moaning, no murmuring—no sound whatever, except the steady splash of the fast falling rain.

Dead.

A thought of Zack welled up into his heart, and troubled it.

He hesitated for a moment, then bent, and put his hand on the bosom of the deathly figure. A faint fluttering was still to be felt; and the pulse was beating feebly. It was not death he looked on, but the swoon that is near neighbour to it.

For a minute he stood with his eyes fixed on the white, calm face beneath him, thinking. "If me and Zack," he whispered, "hadn't been brothers together—" He left the sentence unfinished, took his hat, and quitted the room.

In the passage down stairs, he met one of the servants, who opened the street-door for him.

"Your master wants you," he said, and left the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

MATTHEW GRICE'S REVENGE.

Neither knowing nor caring whither he went, Matthew Grice took the first turning he came to. It happened to be the street communicating with the long suburban road, at the extremity of which Mr. Blyth lived. Mat followed this road mechanically,

not casting a glance at the painter's abode when he passed it, and taking no notice of a cab, with luggage on the roof, which drew up, as he walked by, at the garden gate. If he had looked round at the vehicle for a moment, he must have seen Valentine inside it, counting out his fare.

But he still went on—looking aside at nothing. The shower was now subsiding; and the first rays of returning sunlight, as they streamed through mist and cloud, fell warmly on his face.

Though he did not show it, there was trouble within him. The name of Zack was often on his lips, and he varied constantly in his rate of walking; now quickening, now slackening his pace. It was evening before he turned back towards home—night before he sat again in the chair by young Thorpe's bedside.

"I'm better to-night, Mat," said Zack, answering his enquiries. "Blyth has come back: he's been sitting here with me. Where have you been to-day, you restless old Rough and Tough?" he continued, something of his natural light-hearted manner returning. There's a letter for you. The landlady said she would put it in the front room.

Matthew opened the letter, which proved to contain two enclosures. One was addressed to Mr. Blyth: the other had no direction. The handwriting in the latter being strange to him, Mat looked first for the name at the end, and found that it was Thorpe. "Wait a bit," he said, as Zack spoke just then, "I want to read my letter. We'll talk after."

This is what he read:—

"Some hours have passed since you left my house. I have had time to collect a little composure. Now that I can write calmly, I send you this letter.

"My object is not to ask you how you became possessed of the secret which I had kept from every one—even from my wife—but to offer you such explanation as you have a right to demand. I do not cavil about that right—I admit that you possess it, without desiring further proof than your actions, and the Bracelet in your possession, have afforded me.

"You should first be told that the assumed name by which I was known in Dibbledean originated in a foolish jest—in a wager that certain companions, who were accustomed to ridicule my fondness for botanical pursuits, and often to follow and disturb me when I went in search of botanical specimens, would

not be able to discover me in my country retreat. I went to Dibbledean, because the neighbourhood was famous for rare ferns, which I desired to possess; and I took my assumed name before I went to keep me from being traced by my companions. My father alone was in the secret, and came to see me once or twice. I have no excuse for continuing to preserve my false name, at a time when I was bound to be candid about myself. My conduct was as criminal in this, as in greater things.

"My stay at the cottage I had taken, lasted longer than my father would have permitted, if I had not deceived him, and if he had not been harassed at that time by difficulties in his business. These difficulties arrived at a climax, and his health broke down. His presence, or the presence of a qualified person to represent him, was required in Germany, where one of his business houses was established. I was his only son; he had taken me as a partner; and had allowed me to absent myself from my duties for months, and to follow my botanical pursuits as I pleased. When he wrote me word that great part of his property, and great part, consequently, of my sisters' fortunes, depended on my going to Germany (his health not permitting him to take the journey), I had no choice but to place myself at his disposal.

"I went, assured that my absence would not last more than three or four months at the most.

"While abroad, I wrote to your sister constantly. No thought of abandoning her had ever entered my heart: my dearest hope, was the hope of seeing her again. Not one of my letters was answered. I was detained in Germany beyond the time I had consented to remain; and in my anxiety I ventured to write twice to your father. Those letters also remained unanswered. When I got back to England, I immediately sent a person on whom I could rely to Dibbledean, to make inquiries which I dreaded to make myself. My messenger was turned from your doors, with the news of your sister's flight and of her death.

"It was then I suspected that my letters had been tampered with. It was then, when the violence of my grief had a little abated, that the news of your sister's flight inspired me, for the first time, with a suspicion of the consequence which had followed the commission of my sin. You may think it strange that this suspicion should not have occurred before. It would seem so no longer if I detailed to you the peculiar system of home education by which my father, strictly and conscientiously,

endeavoured to preserve me—as other young men are not usually preserved—from the moral contaminations of the world. But it would be useless to dwell on this now. No explanations can alter the events of the miserable past.

“Anxiously—though privately, and in fear and trembling—I caused such inquiries to be made as I hoped might decide the question whether the child existed. They were long persevered in, but useless—useless, perhaps, as I now think with bitter sorrow, because I trusted them to others, and had not the courage to make them myself.

“Two years after that time I married, under circumstances not of an ordinary kind—what circumstances you have no claim to know. That part of my life is my secret and my wife’s, and belongs to us.

“I have now dwelt long enough for your information on my own guilty share in the events of the Past. As to the Present and the Future, I have a word left to say.

“You have declared that I shall expiate, by the exposure of my secret before my friends, the wrong your sister suffered. My life has been one long expiation for that wrong. My broken health, my altered character, my weary secret sorrows, have punished me for many years past more heavily than you think. Do you desire to see me visited by more poignant sufferings? If it be so, you may enjoy the vindictive triumph of having already inflicted them. Your threats will force me, in a few hours, from the friends I have lived with, at the very time when the affection shown to me, and the honour conferred on me by those friends, have made their society most precious to my heart. You force me from this, and more—for you force me from my home, at the moment when my son has entreated me to take him back to my fireside.

“These trials, heavy as they are, I am ready to endure, if, by accepting them humbly, I may have made atonement for my sin. But more I have not fortitude to meet. I cannot face the exposure with which you are resolved to overwhelm me. The anxiety—perhaps, the weakness—of my life, has been to keep the respect of others. You are about, by disclosing the crime which dishonoured my youth, to deprive me of my good fame. I can let it go without a struggle, as part of the punishment I have deserved; but I have not the courage to see you take it from me. My sensations tell me that I have not long to live; my convictions assure me that I cannot fitly prepare myself for death,

until I am far removed from worldly interests and terrors—in a word, from the horror of an exposure, which I have deserved, but which, at the end of my life, is more than I can endure. We have seen the last of each other in this world. To-night I shall be beyond the reach of your retaliation; I shall be journeying to the retreat in which the short remainder of my life will be hidden from you and all men.

“It now only remains for me to advert to the two enclosures in this letter.

“The first is addressed to Mr. Blyth. I leave it to reach his hands through you; because I am ashamed to communicate with him directly. If what you said about my child be the truth—and I cannot dispute it—then, in my ignorance of her identity, in my estrangement from the house of her protector, I have unconsciously committed such an offence against Mr. Blyth as no contrition can ever atone for. Now indeed I feel how presumptuously merciless my bitter conviction of the turpitude of my own sin, has made me towards what I deemed like sins in others. Now I know that, unless you have spoken falsely, I have been guilty of casting the shame of my own deserted child in the teeth of the very man who had nobly given her an asylum in his own house. The anguish which the bare suspicion of this has inflicted on me might well have been my death.

“You are free to look at the letter to Mr. Blyth. Besides the expression of my shame, my sorrow, and my sincere repentance, it contains some questions, to which Mr. Blyth will, I doubt not, write answers. The questions only refer to the child’s identity; and the address I have written at the end, is that of the house of business of my lawyer in London. He will forward the document to me, arrange with Mr. Blyth the manner in which a fit provision from my property may be secured to his adopted child. He has deserved her love, and to him I gratefully leave her. For myself, I am not worthy to look upon her face.

“The second enclosure is for my son; and is to be delivered in the event of your having already disclosed to him the secret of his father’s guilt. But, if you have not done this—if any mercy towards me has entered into your heart, and pleads for pardon and for silence—then destroy the letter, and tell him that he will find a communication waiting for him at the house of my agent. He wrote to ask my pardon—he has it freely. Freely, in my turn, I hope to have his forgiveness for severities exercised towards him, which were honestly meant to preserve

him betimes from falling as his father fell, but which I now fear were persevered in too long. I have suffered for this error, as for others, heavily—more heavily, when he abandoned his home, than I wish him to know.

"My hand grows weaker: I can write no more. Let me close this by entreating your pardon. If you grant it, then I also ask your prayers."

With this the letter ended.

Mathew sat holding it in his hand. He looked round once or twice at the enclosed letter from Mr. Thorpe to his son, which lay close by—but did not destroy it; did not so much as touch it.

Zack spoke to him from the inner room.

"You must have done reading your letter by this time Mat. I've been thinking of the talks we used to have about going to America together, and trying a little buffalo hunting in the wilds. If my father takes me into favour again, and can be got to say Yes, I should like to go with you, Mat. Not for too long, you know, because of my mother, and friends over here. But a sea voyage, and a little scouring about in what you call the lonesome places, would do me good! I wonder whether my father would let me go?"

"I know he would, Zack."

"You! How?"

"I'll tell you another time. You shall have your run, Zack. As he said this, he looked again at Mr. Thorpe's letter to his son, and took it up this time.

"How I wish it was strong enough to start! Come here, Mat, and let's talk about it."

"Wait a bit, and I will." Pronouncing those words, he rose from his chair. "For your sake, Zack," he said, and dropped the letter into the fire.

"What can you be about?" asked young Thorpe.

"Do you call to mind," said Mat, going into the bedroom, and sitting by the lad's pillow—"Do you call to mind me saying, that I'd be brothers with you, when first us two came together? Zack, I've been trying to be as good as my word."

"Trying? What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Never mind: you'll make it out some day. Let's talk about getting aboard ship, and going a buffalo-hunting."

They discussed the projected expedition, until Zack grew sleepy. As he fell off into a doze, Mat went back into the front

room; and, taking Mr. Thorpe's letter to Mr. Blyth, left Kirk Street for the painter's house.

It had occurred to Valentine to unlock his bureau twice since his return, but on neither occasion had he found it necessary to open that drawer at the back, in which he had secreted the Hair Bracelet years ago. He was consequently still ignorant that it had been taken from him, when Mathew Grice entered the painting-room, and put it into his hand.

Consternation so overpowered him, that he suffered his visitor to lock the door, and lead him peremptorily to a chair, without uttering a word of inquiry. All through the narrative, on which Mat entered, he sat speechless, until Mr. Thorpe's letter was placed in his hands, and he was informed that Madonna was still to be left under his own care. Then, for the first time, his cheeks showed symptoms of returning to their natural colour, and he exclaimed fervently, "Thank God! I shan't lose her after all! I wish you had begun by telling me that, the moment you came!"

Saying this, he began to read Mr. Thorpe's letter. When he had finished it, and looked up at Mat, tears were in his eyes.

"I can't help it," said the simple-hearted painter. "It would even affect you, Mr. Grice, to be addressed in such terms of humiliation as these. How can he doubt my forgiving him, when he has a right to my everlasting gratitude for not asking me to part with our darling? They never met—he has never seen her face," continued Valentine, in lower tones. "She always wore her vail down, by my wish, when we went out; and our walks were generally into the country. I only once remember seeing him coming towards us; and then I crossed the road, knowing we were not on terms. There's something shocking in father and daughter living so near, yet being—if one may say so—so very far apart. It is dreadful to think of. It is far more dreadful to think of its having been her hand which held up the hair for you to look at, and her little innocent action which led to the discovery of who her father really was!"

"Do you ever mean to let her know as much about it as we do?" asked Mathew.

The look of dismay began to appear again in Valentine's face. "Have you told Zack?" he inquired, nervously.

"No," said Mat; "and don't you! When Zack's on his legs, he's going to take a voyage, and get a season's hunting with me in the wild country over the water. I'm as fond of the lad as if he was my own flesh and blood. I cottoned to him when he hit

out for me at the singing-shop—and we've been brothers ever since. You mightn't think it; but I've spared Zack's father for Zack's sake; and I don't ask no more reward than to take the lad a hunting for a season or two. When he comes back, and we say Good-bye, I'll tell him all; but I won't risk bringing so much as a cross look into his eyes now, by dropping a word to him of what's passed betwixt his father and me."

Although this speech excited no little surprise in Valentine's mind, it did not succeed in suspending the anxieties which had been awakened in him by Matthew's preceding question, and which he now began to feel the necessity of confiding to Mrs. Blyth—his grand counsellor in all difficulties.

"Do you mind waiting," he said, "while I go up stairs and break the news to my wife? Without her advice I don't know what to do about communicating our discovery to the poor child. Do you mind waiting?"

He remained away a long time. When he came back his face did not seem to have gained in composure.

"My wife has told me of another discovery," he said, "which her motherly love for our adopted daughter enabled her to make some time since. I have been sadly distressed at hearing of it. But I need say no more on the subject to you, than that Mrs. Blyth has at once decided me to confide nothing to Madonna until Zack has got well enough and has left England. When I heard just now, from you, of his projected voyage, I confess I saw objections to it. They have all been removed by what my wife has told me. I agree with her that the best thing Zack can do is to make the trip. You are willing to take care of him; and I honestly believe we may safely trust him with you."

A serious difficulty being thus disposed of, Valentine found leisure to pay some attention to minor things. Among other questions which he now asked, was one relating to the Hair Bracelet, and to the manner in which Matthew had become possessed of it. He was answered by the frankest confession, a confession which tried even his kindly and forbearing disposition to the utmost, as he listened to it; and which drew from him, when it was ended, strong terms of reproach.

Mat listened; then, taking his hat to go, muttered words of rough apology, which Valentine's good-nature induced him to accept, as soon as they were spoken. "We must let bygones be bygones," said the painter. "You have been candid with me, at last; and, in recognition of that, I say 'Good-night, Mr. Grice,' as a friend of yours still."

When Mat returned to Kirk Street, the landlady came out of her parlour to tell him of a visitor who had been to the lodgings in his absence. An elderly lady, looking pale and ill, had asked to see young Mr. Thorpe, and had prefaced the request by saying that she was his mother. Zack was then asleep, but the lady had been taken up stairs to see him in bed—had stooped, and kissed him—and had then gone away in tears. Matthew's face grew grave as he listened, but he said nothing when the landlady had done, except a word or two charging her not to mention to Zack what had happened. It was plain that Mrs. Thorpe had been told her husband's secret, and that she had devoted herself to him, as comforter and companion, to the last.

When the doctor paid his visit, the next morning, he was called on for an answer to the important question of when Zack would be fit to travel. After due consideration and careful inspection of the injured side of the patient's head, he replied that in a month's time the lad might go on board ship; and that the sea-voyage proposed would do more towards restoring him to perfect health than all the medicines that all the doctors in England could prescribe.

Matthew might have found the month's inaction to which he was now obliged to submit for Zack's sake, rather tedious, but for the arrival of a professional visitor from Dibbledean.

Though his client had entirely forgotten him, Mr. Tatt had not by any means forgotten his client, but had, on the contrary, attended to his interests with unremitting assiduity. He had discovered that Mat was entitled, under his father's will, to two thousand pounds, if his identity could be properly established. To effect this result was now the grand object of Mr. Tatt's ambition. He had the prospect not only of making a little money, but of establishing a reputation in Dibbledean, if he succeeded—and, by dint of perseverance, he ultimately did succeed. He carried Mat about to all sorts of places, insisted on his signing all sorts of papers and making all sorts of declarations, and ended by accumulating such a mass of evidence before the month was out that Mr. Newby, as executor to "the late Joshua Grice," declared himself convinced of the claimant's identity.

On being informed of this result, Mat ordered the lawyer, after first deducting his bill from the legacy, to draw him out such a legal form as might enable him to settle his property on another person. When Mr. Tatt asked the name of this person, he was told to write "Martha Peckover."

"Mary's child has got you to look after her, and money enough from her father to keep her," said Mat, as he put the signed instrument into Valentine's hands. "When Martha Peckover's old and past work, she may want a bank-note to fall back on. Give her this—and say she earned it the day she stopped and suckled Mary's child by the road-side."

The day of departure drew near. Zack rallied so rapidly, that he was able, a week before it arrived, to go himself and fetch the letter from his father which was waiting for him at the Agent's office. It assured him, briefly, but kindly, of the forgiveness which he had written to ask—referred him to the man of business for particulars of the allowance granted to him, while he pursued his studies in the Art, or otherwise occupied himself—urged him always to look on Mr. Blyth as the best counsellor he could have—and ended by engaging him to write often to his mother; sending his letters to be forwarded through the Agent. When Zack, hearing from this gentleman that his father had left the house in Baregrove Square, desired to know what had occasioned the change of residence, he was only informed that the state of Mr. Thorpe's health had obliged him to seek perfect retirement: and that there were reasons at present for not mentioning the place of his retreat to any one, which it was not deemed expedient for his son to become acquainted with.

The day of departure arrived.

In the morning, by Valentine's advice, Zack wrote to his mother; only telling her, in reference to his proposed trip, that he was about to travel, in the company of a friend, of whom Mr. Blyth approved. While he was thus engaged, the painter had a private interview with Matthew Grice, and very earnestly charged him to remember his responsibilities towards his young companion. Mat answered briefly and characteristically: "I told you I was as fond of him as if he was my own flesh and blood. If you don't believe I shall take care of him, after that—I can't say nothing to make you."

Both the travellers were taken up into Mrs. Blyth's room to say Farewell. It was a sad parting. Zack's spirits had not been so good as usual, since the day of his visit to the Agent's—and the other persons assembled were all more or less affected by the approaching separation. Madonna had looked ill and anxious—though she would not own to having anything the matter with her—for some days past. But now, when she saw the

parting looks exchanged around her, the poor girl's agitation got beyond her control, and became so evident that Zack wisely hurried over the farewell scene. He went out first. Matthew followed him to the landing—then stopped—and suddenly retraced his steps.

He entered the room again, and took his sister's child by the hand once more; bent over her as she stood pale and in tears before her, and kissed her on the cheek. "Tell her some day that me and her mother was playmates," he said to Mrs. Blyth, as he turned away.

Valentine accompanied them to the ship. When they shook hands together, he said to Matthew: "Zack has engaged to come back in a year's time. Shall we see you again with him?"

Mat took the painter aside, without directly answering him? "If ever you go to Bangbury," he whispered, "look into the churchyard, in the dark corner amongst the trees. There's a bit of walnut-wood planking put up now at the place where she's buried; and it would be a comfort to be to know that it was kep' clean and neat. I should take it kind of you if you'd give it a brush or two with your hand when you're near it—for I never hope to see the place myself, no more."

Sadly and thoughtfully, Valentine returned alone to his own house. He went up at once to his wife's room.

As he opened the door, he started, and stopped on the threshold. Madonna was sitting on the couch by her adopted mother, with her face hidden on Mrs. Blyth's bosom, and her arms clasped tight round Mrs. Blyth's neck.

"Have you ventured to tell her, Lavvie?" he asked.

Mrs. Blyth was not able to speak in answer—then softly him with tearful eyes, and bowed her head.

Valentine lingered at the door for a moment—then softly closed it and left them together.

CLOSING CHAPTER.

A YEAR AND A HALF AFTERWARDS.

It is sunset after a fine day in August, and Mr. Blyth is enjoying the evening breeze in the invalid room.

Besides the painter and his wife, and Madonna, two visitors are present, who occupy both the spare beds in the house. One is Mrs. Thorpe, the other Mrs. Peckover; and they have been

asked to become Valentine's guests, to assist at the joyful ceremony of welcoming Zack to England. He has outstayed his year's leave of absence by nearly six months; and his appearance at Mr. Blyth's has become an event of hourly expectation.

There is a sad and significant change in Mrs. Thorpe's dress. She wears the widow's cap and weeds. It is nearly seven months since her husband died. With him Nature drooped to her final decay gradually and wearily; but his death was painless, and his mental powers remained unimpaired. One of the last names that lingered lovingly on his lips—after he had bade his wife farewell—was the name of his absent son.

Mrs. Thorpe sits close to Mrs. Blyth, and talks to her. The kind eyes of the painter's wife are brighter than they have been for many a long year past, and the clear tones of her voice—cheerful always—have a joyous sound in them now. Ever since the first days of the Spring season, she has been gaining so greatly in health and strength, that the "favourable turn" has taken place in her malady, which was spoken of as "possible" by the doctors long ago, at the time of her first sufferings. She has several times, for the last fortnight, been moved from her couch for a few hours to a seat near the window; and if the fine weather still continues, she is to be taken out, in a day or two, in an invalid chair.

The prospect of this happy event, and the pleasant expectation of Zack's return, have made Valentine more gaily talkative and more nimbly restless than ever. As he skips discursively about the room at this moment, talking of all sorts of subjects, and managing to mix Art up with every one of them; dressed in the old jaunty frock-coat with the short tails, he looks, if possible, younger, plumper, rosier, and brisker than when he was first introduced to the reader.

Mrs. Peckover, arrayed in festively-flaring cap-ribbons, sits close to the window to get all the air she can, and tries to make more of it by fanning herself with the red cotton pocket-handkerchief to which she has been all her life attached. She has not lost an inch of rotundity; suffers, in consequence, from the heat; and talks to Mr. Blyth with parenthetical pantings, which reflect little credit on the cooling influence of the breeze, or the ventilating properties of the pocket-handkerchief fan.

Madonna sits opposite to her—as cool and pretty a contrast as can be imagined, in her white muslin dress, and light rose-coloured ribbons. She is looking at Mrs. Peckover, and smiling

every now and then at the comically languishing faces made by that excellent woman, to express to "little Mary" the extremity of her sufferings from the heat.

Mrs. Thorpe, in her conversation with Mrs. Blyth, has been reminded of a letter to one of her sisters, which she has not yet completed, and goes to her room to finish it—Valentine running to open the door for her, with the nimblest gallantry, then returning to the window and addressing Mrs. Peckover.

"Hot as ever, eh? Shall I get you one of Lavvie's fans?" says Mr. Blyth.

"No, thank'ee, sir; I ain't quite melted," answers Mrs. Peckover. "But I'll tell you what I wish you would do. I wish you would read me Master Zack's letter. You promised, you know, sir."

"And I would have performed my promise, Mrs. Peckover, if Mrs. Thorpe had not been in the room. There are passages in the letter, which might revive painful remembrances in her. Now she has left us, I have not the least objection."

Saying this, Valentine takes a letter from his pocket. Madonna asks by a sign if she may look over his shoulder and read it for the second time. Mr. Blyth makes her sit on his knee, puts his arm round her waist, and begins to read:—

"My Dear Valentine,—Although I am writing to you to announce my return, I cannot say that I take up my pen in good spirits. It is not so long since I picked up my last letters from England that told me of my father's death. But besides that, I have had a heavy trial to bear, in hearing the dreadful secret, which you all kept from me when it was discovered; and afterwards in parting from Matthew Grice.

"What I felt when I knew the secret, and heard why Mat and all of you had kept it from me, I may be able to tell you—but I cannot and dare not write about it. You may be interested to hear how my parting with Matthew happened.

"You know, from my other letters, all the glorious hunting and riding we have had, and the thousands of miles of country we have been over, and the wonderful places we have seen. Well, Bahia (the place I now write from) has been the end of our travels. It was here I told Mat of my father's death; and he agreed with me that it was my duty to go home, and comfort my poor dear mother, by the first ship that sailed for England. After we had settled that, he said he had something to tell me, and asked me to go with him, northward, half a day's march

along the sea-coast; saying we could talk together quietly as we went along. I saw that he had got his rifle over his shoulder, and his baggage at his back; and thought it odd—but he stopped me from asking any questions, by telling me from beginning to end, all that you and he knew about my father, before we left England. I was at first so amazed by what I heard, and then had so much to say to him about it, that our half day's march, by the time we had got to the end of it, seemed to me to have hardly lasted an hour.

"He stopped, though, at the place he had fixed on; and held out his hand to me, and said these words: 'I've done my duty by you, Zack, as brother should by brother. The time's come at last for us two to say Good-bye. You're going back over the sea to your friends, and I'm going inland by myself on the tramp.' I had heard him talk of our parting in this way before, but had never thought it would really take place; and I tried hard, as you may imagine, to make him change his mind, and sail for England with me. But it was useless.

"'No, Zack,' he said, 'I doubt if I'm fit for the life you're going back to lead. I've given it a trial, and a bitter one it's been. I began life on the tramp; and on the tramp I shall end it. Good-bye, Zack. I shall think of you, when I light my fire and cook my victuals without you.'

"I tried to control myself, Valentine; but my eyes got dim, and I caught him by the arm. 'Mat,' I said, 'I can't part with you in this way. Don't shut the future up from both of us for ever. We have been eighteen months together, let another year and a half pass if you like; and then give yourself, and give me, another chance. Say you'll meet me, when that time is past, in New York; or say at least, you'll let me hear where you are?' His face worked, and he shook his head. 'Come, Mat,' I said, as cheerfully as I could, 'if I am ready to cross the sea again, for your sake, you can't refuse to do what I ask you, for mine?' 'Will it make the parting easier to you?' he asked, kindly. 'Yes, indeed it will,' I answered. 'Well, Zack,' he said, 'you shall have your way. Say no more, now. Let's cut it as short as we can, or we shan't part as men should. God bless you, lad, and all you're going back to see.' Those were his last words.

"After he had walked a few yards inland, he turned round and waved his hand—then went on, and never turned again. I sat down on the sand-hillock where we had said Good-bye and

burst out crying. What with the secret he had been telling me, and then the parting, when I didn't expect it, all I had of the man about me gave way. And I sat alone, crying on the sand-hillock, with the surf roaring miles out at sea behind me, and the great plain before, with Matthew walking over it alone on his way to the mountains beyond.

"When I had had time to get ashamed of myself for crying, and had got my eyesight clear again, he was already far away. I ran to the top of the highest hillock, and watched him over the plain—a desert, without a shrub to break the miles of flat ground spreading away to the mountains. I watched him, as he got smaller and smaller—I watched till he got a mere speck—till I was doubtful whether I still saw him—till I was certain at last, that the great vacancy of the plain had swallowed him up from sight.

"My heart was very heavy as I went back to the town by myself. It is sometimes heavy still; for though I think much of my mother, and of my sister—whom you have been so kind a father to, and whose affection it is such a new happiness to me to have the prospect of soon returning—I think occasionally of dear old Mat, too, and have my melancholy moments when I remember that he and I are not going back together."

Here Mr. Blyth stops and closes the letter, for Mrs. Thorpe re-enters. "The rest is only about when he expects to be back," whispers Valentine. "By my calculations," he continues, raising his voice and turning towards Mrs. Thorpe; "by my calculations (which, not having a mathematical head, I don't boast of, mind, as being correct), Zack is likely, I should say, to be here in about—"

"Hush!" cries Mrs. Peckover, jumping up with incredible agility at the window. "Don't talk about when he will be here—here he is! He's come in a cab—he's got out into the garden—he sees me. Welcome back, Master Zack, welcome back! Hooray!" Here Mrs. Peckover forgets her company manners, and waves the red cotton handkerchief out of the window in an irrepressible burst of triumph.

Zack's hearty laugh is heard outside—then his quick step on the stairs—then the door opens, and he comes in with his beaming sunburnt face healthier and heartier than ever. His first embrace is for his mother, his second for Madonna; and, after he has greeted every one else cordially, he goes back to those

two, and Mr. Blyth is glad to see that he sits down between them and takes their hands gently and affectionately in his.

Matthew Grice is in all their memories, when the first greetings are over. Valentine and Madonna look at each other—and the girl's fingers sign the letters of Matthew's name.

"She is thinking of the comrade you have lost," says the painter, addressing himself, a little sadly, to Zack.

"The only living soul that's kin to her now by her mother's side," adds Mrs. Peckover. "It's like her pretty ways to be thinking of him kindly, for her mother's sake."

"Are you really determined, Zack, to take that second voyage?" asks Valentine. "Are you determined to go back to America, on the one faint chance of seeing Mat once more?"

"If I am a living man, eighteen months hence," Zack answers, "nothing shall prevent my taking the voyage. Matthew Grice loved me like a brother. And, like a brother, I will bring him back—if he lives to meet me, when the time comes."

The time came; and the two comrades—in years so far apart, in sympathies so close together—lived to look each other in the face again. The solitude which had once hardened Matthew Grice, had wrought on him, in his riper age, to better ends. In all his later roamings, the tie, which had bound him to those sacred human interests in which we live and move and have our being—the tie which he himself believed that he had broken—held fast to him. His grim face softened, his heavy hand trembled in the grasp that held it, as Zack pleaded with him once more; and, this time, not in vain.

"I've never been my own man again," said Mat, "since you and me wished each other good-bye. The lonesome places have got strange to me—and my rifle's heavier than ever I knew it before. There's some part of myself that seems left behind like, between Mary's grave and Mary's child. Must I cross the seas to find it? Give us hold of your hand, Zack—and take the leavings of me back, along with you."

So the noble nature of the man unconsciously asserted itself in his simple words. So the two returned to the old land together. The first kiss with which his dead sister's child welcomed him back, cooled the Tramp's Fever for ever; and the Man of many Wanderings rested at last among the friends who loved him, to wander no more.





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